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**Structure of Module / Syllabus of a module (Define Topic / Sub-topic of module)**
Introduction, Theories of Modernity and Class, Class Analysis, Class and Political Mobilization, Class and Electoral Politics, Conclusion

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Impact of Modernity on Class

Introduction

Class, as a mode of social stratification, dates back to the feudal societies of Europe. But its significance in politics was not recognized until the advent of modernization and capitalism. Stewart Morris defines class as ‘a group in itself as an objective social cleavage’ and ‘for itself’ as a socio-economic group with a collective identity a common political action.” In Britain, class identity was linked with occupational status and income group. But the concept of class is dynamic that drives new meaning with every socio-economic transformative process. Class analysis forms an integral component of comparative political philosophy. The concepts of power elite, ruling class, mass, class struggle, circulating elite emerge in the comparative theory of social class.

Class division in Western societies is a direct consequence of industrialization and urbanization associated with the process of modernization. The progress of modernization in the advanced capitalist societies has led to changes in class configuration. Structural changes in the nature of employment have created new class relations. This has further impacted other areas of human thought and action, but more specifically the political sphere. The political history of Western societies clearly shows that the nature of class divisions have been an important determinant of political trajectory of such societies.

The chapter begins by understanding and analyzing the various theoretical positions on modernity and class particularly in advanced industrial nations of the West. Two streams of ideas that have remained dominant in comparative political theory of class are Marxism and the Power elite theory. This is followed by an analysis of the class relations in contemporary Western society. The next section conceptualizes the concept of class and class relations that
emerged in modern Europe followed by a comparative picture of class and electoral politics through a cross-country examination.

Theories of Modernity and Class in Advanced Capitalist Societies

The sociological interpretation of the nature of modernity and its impact on class was offered by Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx attempted to link class divisions in society with the relations of production. The owners of means of production during different historical junctures tend to constitute the ‘dominant class’ and rest of the people who were subject to the exploitation and subjugation of the dominant class were labelled as working class. The dominant class derives its power and strength by exploiting the repressed class. Thus, class analysis provided a foundation to understand social stratification in the modern world.

Marx also recognized the existence of other smaller classes such as financial aristocracy, peasantry, bureaucrats and professionals. Marx and Engels toagether identified the emergence of the petty bourgeoisie class in West European countries that had turned into fully developed modern civilization. The petty bourgeoisie class consisted of small property owners a class that owned smaller means of production without employing wage labour. It also included employees who comprised the lower rungs of management or supervision in private industries like functional foreman and departmental managers. Petty bourgeoisie is seen as a volatile class whose interests oscillate between those of bourgeoisie and industrial proletariat. As supervisors in modern organization, they act as agents of capitalist class by exploiting the workers. On the other hand, they appear more as proletariat as they largely hail from that category.

The concept of modern capitalist state and class has been dealt extensively in his texts on The German Ideology, The Eighteenth Brumaire, Class Struggles in France 1848-50, and das Capital. Later, the Neo-Marxism, a modified version of Classical Marxian thought got subdivided into two braches- Instrumentalist Marxism and Structural Marxism. These approaches provided new insights in the understanding of the relationship between state, class and power in rapidly changing modern societies of West Europe.

The Instrumentalist approach considers the modern capitalist state as an instrument of dominant class. This view is held by scholars like C.Wright Mills, G. William Domhoff, and Ralph Milliband in light of the emerging power structures in American society. The idea is derived from Communist Manifesto in which Marx and Engels defines the modern state as a
committee to manage the affairs of the bourgeoisie class. The class interests get reflected in
the programme and policies of state. In his analysis of business elites in America, Milliband
observes that the capitalist class possess immense power and wealth and represent the upper
classes of American society. Similarly, while doing a class analysis, Mill describes the power
structure with elite at the top, middle level of special interest groups and the masses.
Domhoff further demonstrates how the business elites in the country not only control the
economy but were also actively involved with political parties, government and civic
associations.\textsuperscript{ii}

The other stream of Marxist theory of class and state power is the structuralist approach
which argues that the state instead of being manipulated by the capitalist class operates
according to the development of capitalism. The main advocates of this approach are
Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas. The state has its own mechanisms and agencies like police,
bureaucracy, courts, army that intervenes when required to preserve capitalism and permit the
domination of ruling sections over working class. Poutlantzas in his book \textit{Political Power
and Social Classes} attempts to analyze the impact of the modern capitalist state on the
capitalist and working class and observes how the state through its structures and apparatus
preserves capitalism. Further, he suggests three basic premises to understand class in a
modern society which are: class in advanced capitalist society is a reflection of antagonistic
social relations and struggle; classes are structured at economic, political and ideological
levels; and class positions are structured through division of labour.\textsuperscript{iii}

In the context of modernity, Max Weber the leading sociologist attempted to understand class
and class relations as a natural outcome of distribution of resources in capital, product and
labour markets. But he considered the modern capitalism dynamic leading to social mobility
amongst classes. In contrast to Marxism, he believed that social or political action is not
necessarily a result of class interests. He focussed more on status groups in modern societies
that constituted communities held together by common life-styles, social esteem and honour
than their place in the market or production process.

\textit{Power Elite theory}

The theory originated in mid-1960s in the writings of Mosca, Pareto and C.Wright Mills. Its
central argument is that the society is naturally governed by few who can be distinguished
from majority of people by virtue of their social status, power position and wealth. This
governing class is called elite while others constitute the masses. Pareto understood power
shifts through circulation of elites in societies. Though Pareto did not identify any particular socio-economic group as constituting the elite, he surely underscored the natural necessity of ruling elites. On a similar note, Mosca too made a distinction between the ruling class which is less in number, monopolizes power and appropriates wealth and the ruled, ‘the masses’, who naturally lack organizational skills and feel contended under the rule of elites. Like Pareto, he highlighted the possibilities of replacement of old ruling class by a new one. However, the power shifts only took place between elites although the nature of elites might change.

The elite theory came under critical spotlight with the advancement of pluralism after analyzing the nature of power struggle in American politics. Pluralism recognized the dispersion of distribution of power in society between different groups. It thus shifted the focus of power and class analysis from individuals to groups which are formed on the basis of shared beliefs, interests and attitudes. The main advocates of the pluralist theory are Robert Dahl, Martin Lipset, Arnold Rose and David Truman. Dahl recognized the existence of ‘polyarchy’ in American society which are characterized by sub-system autonomy and organizational pluralism. As a result, competition of power takes place between almost equally-powerful groups and classes. When confronted by group pressures, the state tends to achieve equilibrium by incorporating accurately the demands of these diverse groups in its policies and programmes. Often, however, few policies get implemented under the constraints of capitalism and class society.

**Contemporary Schemes of Class Analysis in Western World**

Class analysis in comparative research has gone deeper into the understanding of heterogeneity within class groups created as a result of changes in the European market. To begin with Goldthorpe and Ericson (1993) use an economic criterion to understand class and link class-division with employment relations. Accordingly they recognize the existence of three ‘economic classes in the advanced capitalist societies: employers who buy the labour in the market; employees who sell their labour to others and get subjected to the authority and control of the latter; and self-employed who work independently without buying and selling labour in the market. Wright’s scheme identifies three principal economic classes: capitalists, workers and petty bourgeoisie. This categorization clearly comes very close to the Marxian scheme of social stratification under capitalism.
John Scott views these analyses as relevant for class analysis in the 19th century West European societies and of little value for 20th century. The changing nature of employment and ownership has confined individual proprietorship to the class of petty bourgeoisie as mentioned earlier. A vast majority of workers or employees work in large corporate organizations that are jointly owned by shareholders than any single private owner.

On a different note, Dahrendorf understands class differentiation as resulting from bureaucratization of employer organizations in the modern societies of 20th century. He categorizes the employee class into two types: service contract employees and labour contract employees. Service-contract employees have a secured tenure and salary, possess specialized knowledge, and enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in their work. However, there are gradations within the service class with lower and higher levels of authority. On the other side, the labour-contract employees work for short duration under the supervision of employers. Their job and salary being subject to the decision of their employers is highly insecure. This class may be further classified into ‘skilled’, ‘semi-skilled’ and ‘non-skilled’.

These class divisions are found to be firmly established in contemporary British society. The rapidly expanding service sector has created a large pool of technical professionals who enjoy disposable income as high as semi-skilled and unskilled workers and own company shares which help them make substantial capital gains and investments. It is also shown that class differences are clearly visible in the health indicators amongst British people like twice as many unskilled workers as service-contract employees have hearing, eyesight and dental problems. Class-based differences are also found in life expectancy and child and infant mortality.

**Understanding Social Class in West Europe**

The concept of ‘social class’ originated with the advent of capitalism and large-scale industrialization in Western Europe. Classes and class contradictions did exist in feudal societies but the idea received scholarly attention only after the advent of industrial revolution and modernization. The new social order and social stratification was an outgrowth of the modern capitalist system of production. It released new productive forces and symbolized modernity and advancement in all spheres of life. Karl Marx (1818-83) and Engels (1820-95) in their writings refereed to two big classes of industrial capitalists and industrial workers in a capitalist society that was primarily based on class exploitation and corresponding progression of those who owned the means of production. The working class
was not only disadvantaged by its ‘economic position’ but also by its limited access to political power. This form of economic development according to Alain Touraine provided minimum access to power or even to modern forms of consumption for the new working class as the social control of economic activity was exercised by the capitalists.\textsuperscript{vii}

The origin of modern ideas has been closely linked with the bourgeoisie interests in West European nations. These interests symbolized the idea of greater good in both political and economic terms as it challenged autocratic rule by invoking the universal principles of citizenship, civic equality and nation- notions that transgressed the dominance of kin, tribe, village, status and estate, social categories that were linked with feudalism. Analyzing the applicability of universalism in West Europe from a comparative perspective, Ellen Meiksins Wood believes that the idea held a special meaning for French bourgeoisie as it posed a challenge to what he calls as ‘aristocratic particularism’; questioning the dominance of privileged estate, the nobility and the Church.\textsuperscript{viii}

The process of socio-economic transformation from feudalism to capitalism was gradual. But the feudal absolutism was reinforced by limiting people’s participation in political life. The class distinctions were carried forward in the political sphere when property qualifications were imposed for voting rights. In Britain, the process of universal enfranchisement was prolonged and gradual. While the Reforms Act of 1967 enfranchised industrial workers and removed property qualifications for voting, the agricultural labourers got their voting rights not until 1884. In France, the universal male enfranchisement was established through the electoral law of 1848. This included both industrial and agricultural labour. It was the first European nation to have achieved universal male adult franchise. The class factor in political system had very little meaning in Germany as it was still reeling under feudalism complicated further with serious religious, regional and economic divisions. Henceforth, modernization that resulted from the emergence of a prospective bourgeoisie class and a labour force in rest of Europe remained absent in Germany almost till the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. Russell Dalton observes that industrialization that was the driving force behind modernization of Europe came very late in Germany and did not overturn the old feudal and aristocratic order.\textsuperscript{ix}

There is however dispute about who constituted the middle class in West Europe. The general understanding is that the bourgeoisie alone represented the middle class and was instrumental in overthrowing feudalism and initiating the process of modernization. The bourgeoisie class was also not simply identified as an ‘economic category’ but also an agent of democratization
and political transformation. These misconceptions were clarified by locating the constitutive elements of middle class which were businessmen, free professionals, and state officials. R.R. Palmer in the *Age of Democratic Revolution* shows how businessmen constitute one of the elements in middle class.¹ He further observes that the idea of revolution being initiated by the bourgeoisie/middle class to establish capitalism, modernization and democratization was a myth in French Revolution. Tracing the history of France, Alfred Cobban illustrates that the revolution was not led by merchants, financers and businessmen as is usually taken to believe. The frontrunners of the movement were professionals particularly lawyers, rentiers, peasant proprietors and that after the revolution these groups assumed key positions in the state offices and captured political power.xi Middle class was thus held to be a volatile category whose configuration changed with socio-economic transformation in Western societies.

**Class and Political Mobilization in Modern Europe**

Industrialization and urbanization was followed by large-scale migration of workers to city centres in search of new job opportunities created in the factories. This large pool of industrial workers constituted the ‘urban poor population’ living in extremely vulnerable conditions. The mounting oppression and exploitation of the industrial labour and the resulting class disparities by the middle of 19th century indicated the inherent contradictions in the concept of freedom and universality linked with capitalism and modernity.

The rising consciousness amongst the industrial labour spurred trade union activities and labour movements all throughout Europe. However, there are differences between European nations in the nature of movement and process of including labour class in the political mainstream. Labour movement in Europe found its origin in Britain. This seemed a little too obvious as it was first industrial nation of the world. Britain at the turn of the 19th century had a large industrial labour force with almost 2/5th of its population engaged in manufacturing, trade and transport sectors. The working class protests in Britain could be dated back to the early years of Chartist movement in 1837-1842. However, compared to other countries, the relative moderation of labour movement and their amalgamation in a liberal democratic set-up blocked all possibilities of radicalization. The reformism initiated during the middle of 19th century assured the protection of labour rights and their economic needs. In contrast, working-class liberalism could not develop in states where tradition of authoritarianism still continued like Russia, Imperial Germany and pre-war Spain.xii
Political modernization assumed a new dimension with enfranchisement of the industrial and agricultural labour class. Participation which is the essence of modernization received a strong impetus with the extension of voting rights under the Reform Acts initiated in Britain and France in the mid-nineteenth century mentioned earlier. Class that was traditionally linked with social status in feudal times and economic and political control under modern capitalism now became a source of political mobilization. It not only triggered trade union activities but also created opportunities for the formation of labour, socialist and radical parties in Europe. In France, Germany and Italy such parties came up much before the outbreak of the First World War and encompassed radicals and reformists, revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries, communists and later social-democrats. These parties made a strong claim for social rights and welfare state. They campaigned against the extremities of capitalist system and sought state protection of labour rights. Some of their demands included decent wages, fixation of minimum wages and working hours, contract security, protection at workplace and during periods of unemployment, progressive taxation, accidental insurance, and pension scheme.

In Britain, the Labour Party was formed in 1900 as a parliamentary pressure group affiliating to a large number of trade unions across the country. In a short span of time it overtook the Liberal party and formed the first government with Ramsay Mc Donald as the Prime Minister. The formation of Labour party was another step to mitigate radicalization of politics as the party remained committed to the ideals of a ‘reformed liberal ideology’ and welfare state. However, it mainly relied on the support of the lower and marginalized classes particularly industrial labour, agricultural workers and lower middle classes. On the other hand, the upper middle and the upper classes formed the traditional support base of the Conservatives.

Class has been a determining factor in electoral behaviour of people in West European countries. Correlation between class and party preference is easily discernable in the pattern of voting in West European countries. The two classic examples of this behavioural trend are Britain and United States. Britain being the birthplace of industrial revolution and associated modernization processes has been the bastion of class politics in West Europe. The class-based cleavage politics that resulted from the emergence of new productive forces under capitalism became firmly established. It offered class-based mobilization opportunities to the newly formed Labour Party. As observed, “Britain has for many years provided a classic case of a class cleavage in voting with most manual workers voting for the main party of the Left
(Labour) and non-manual workers predominantly voting for the major party of the Right (the Conservatives).\textsuperscript{xv} Analyzing the voting behaviour of British people it is being commented that, ‘Class is the basis of British party politics: all else is embellishment and detail’.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Similarly, class cleavages are clearly discernable in party preferences in United States. Although the two main parties Republicans and Democrats largely follow the liberal democratic ideological framework, they differ in the issues of campaigning. Democrats have greater support amongst blacks, lower classes and the minorities, while Republicans have a strong political base amongst the whites, upper middle classes and the business communities.

French politics is said to be relatively free of feelings about class differences than Britain as equality as a principle is more cherished in the former than latter. Martin A. Schain, in a comparative analysis of class politics in Britain and France observes that French, like the English are conscious of living in a class-divided society but as equality as a principle has assumed greater relevance, deference or difference with the upper classes is far less developed. However, class-based party support is as relevant in France as other countries. Political mobilization of the working classes and agricultural labour was carried out more effectively due to presence of a better-organized, ideologically-committed Socialist party (PS). But, class bases started shifting with social and economic transformation in France. With urbanization and the growth of the service sector there was rise in the salaried middle class population that formed a strong support base for the Socialist Party.

**Link between Class and Electoral Politics in 20th century Western World- Comparative Analysis**

While class served as an important basis of political mobilization with the advent of industrialization and modernization in West Europe, the link between class and politics got weakened with increasing social mobility resulting from technological advancements. The progress of modernization in capitalist societies in 20th century transformed the nature of employment and the associated class relations. The inclusion of new occupational groups in the category of ‘skilled workers’, as stated before, led to both expansion and change in the social profile middle class. Class-based mobilization especially in terms of capitalist/worker divide started losing its relevance in electoral politics.

Comparing the nature of social stratification in some of the advanced capitalist societies in the Western world, Richard Rose observes that class divisions have been more significant in
party politics in Britain due to relative absence of race, language and ethnic distinctions which characterize the societies of US and Canada. Comparative research on voting behaviour also shows that Britain and Scandanavian countries witness highest levels of class-based voting, while it is lowest in case of US and Canada. However, Richard Rose shows the weakening of link between class and party politics in Britain. Analyzing the social differences in voting patterns of 2001 British Parliamentary elections, he draws following inferences regarding class factor in voting:

1. No party won more than half of the middle-class votes.
2. Only 2/5th of the middle-class vote went to Conservatives and labour-class vote for the Labour Party due to cross-class appeal by both the political parties.
3. Less than one out of seven voters belonged to the conventional ‘middle class’ or ‘employee/worker’ categories.xvii

In Germany, class differences in party preferences are clearly visible. The working class vote mainly for SDP and the businessmen and property owners primarily support the CDU. The class configuration has changed with increasing social mobility and shifts in nature of employment, but class factor in party preference still holds vital importance. Highly educated professionals support SDP (Left) and Greens while administrators and managers still vote for CDU (Conservatives). xviii

In US, racial and ethnic differences are of greater significance in politics than class divisions. A lion share of African-American votes still go for Democrats. Analyzing the data on social composition of Party identifiers for 2001, Austin Ranney infers that most of the demographic group support is evenly across the two main parties. He further concludes that no party represents particular class groups like farmers, industrial workers, professionals or businessmen. xix

The class differences have resurfaced in France with an increase in the number immigrants amongst the semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Martin A. Schain observes that these emerging class differences have been reinforced by racial and ethnic differences. This has assumed a political dimension with growing intolerance against ethnic minorities in recent times.

Link between class and politics have thus shown mixed results in West European countries. While there is a general observation about declining class influence in voting in 20th and 21st
centuries, the reality is far from such assumptions. Class politics, as shown in case of France has assumed greater complexity due to racial and ethnic differences. New class categories have emerged as a result of new market dynamics and increasing migration of people from Asian countries. Politics is thus not free of class character; it rather appears to be more complex and intricate due to the growing significance of other identities.

**Conclusion**

Class and modernity are mutually reinforcing as both impact each other. Modernity created new productive forces and thus new forms of class division and that the bourgeoisie class itself contributed towards modernization in economic and political spheres. With the progress of modernity the class relations are transforming in Western societies. Class still holds an important place in political mobilization though ethnic divisions have assumed salience in recent years with the rise of multiculturalism in Western countries.

As relationship between class, state and power assume new dimensions in the global world and contradictions are moderated through the benefits and incentives extended by the welfare state, the traditional modes of analysis in Marxism or the power elite and pluralist theories in comparative political theory stand questioned. New schemes of comparative analysis lay emphasis, as shown earlier, on the impact of changing market dynamics on social mobility and class relations. They challenge the static model of class analysis in Power elite theory on one hand and the strict compartmentalization of class categories in Marxism on the other.

**End Notes:**

1 Stewart Morris, ‘Is Class dead in Modern Britain?’, p.1
2 Ronald Chilcote, pp.359-362
3 Ronald Chilcote, p.369
4 John Scott, Social Class and Stratification in Late Modernity, pp.24-25
5 Ibid., p.27
6 Ibid., p.28


Ibid., p.3


Ibid., p.206


John Scott, “Social Class and Stratification in Late Modernity”, op.cit., p.29, John Scott has cited the works of Nieuweerta and De Graaf (1999); Muller (1999) and Goldthrope (1999)