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## UNIT 2 CLASS AND GENDER

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### Learning Objectives



After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- understand how the two concepts, class and gender are positioned in social inequality and are entangled with each other;
- elucidate the contribution of different feminist perspectives in comprehending the class and gender relation;
- critically analyse Marxist feminism by highlighting its limitations and expounding on domestic division of labour debates for exploring the intertwining between class and gender; and
- contemplate on other dimensions, apart from economist and structuralist, of women's oppression in the class society.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit deals with the notion of social stratification and how class as a system contributes to the understanding and theorisation of social inequality in societies. In doing so, this unit attempts to provide the analytical understanding of class and contemplation on it by Karl Marx and Max Weber. Before describing the converging ground in class and gender relation, attempt has been made to engage with the word ‘gender’ as a differentiating concept, which separates it from the word ‘sex’ by employing various debates in this context. Women’s movements expressed opposition on varieties of oppressions acting against women in every society however class oppression against women was understood inadequately before 1960s. Considering the hindrances, this unit divulges the reasons for the omission of gender from the classic class analysis and the contribution of feminism and its perspectives in defining women’s oppression, in general and with respect to class analysis, in particular. There are four feminist perspectives, namely, radical feminism, material feminism (Marxist feminism), dual system theory and liberal feminism. Out of these perspectives material feminism contributes to the class and gender question as oppression due to capitalist mode of production. Marx’s analysis of class repudiates class relations and the economic exploitation of the women in the family, which Benston, Delphy and Firestone discuss at length in the unit’s section on *Domestic Division of Labour*. Lastly, this unit identifies culture as the key element in discursive approaches, which identifies the limitation of Marxism by interpreting the economy through the lens of culture. Theoretical development by Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘Capital’ with respect of intrusion of culture in class and gender relation has also been discussed. Thus, this unit represents a brief yet complete theoretical journey of the class and gender relation traversed from Marx and Weber to Bourdieu.

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## 2.2 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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Egalitarianism is the much-coveted concept that envisages society free from exploitations, oppressions, hierarchies, poverty, injustices and inequalities. It aspires to percolate this description in social reality. But it is merely a dream, as social inequality has inherently been existing from the simplest to the most complex societies. At the outset, it is important to define the distinction between social inequality and social stratification. Social inequality refers to the existence of socially created inequalities whereas, social stratification refers to a system by which categories of people in society are ranked in a hierarchy, usually in terms of the amount of power, prestige and wealth their members possess. Thus, social stratification is a particular form of social inequality.

### Box

**Social versus Natural inequalities:** Natural Inequalities refer to those inequalities which are established by nature. For example difference in age and sex, colour of skin, bodily strength. ‘By comparison, socially created inequality ‘consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as that of being more rich, more honored, more powerful’ (Bottomore, 1956)

Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist, defined social stratification as the “differential ranking of human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior or inferior relative to one other in certain socially important respect”. Four principles are identified which help explain why social stratification exists. First, social stratification is a characteristic of society and not merely of individuals. Second, social stratification is universal but variable. Third, it persists over generations. And, fourth, it is supported by patterns of belief.

Class system is a form of social stratification which is said to be based on the degree of social mobility. Class systems are systems of social stratification based on individual achievement. Individual ability, promoted by *open social mobility*, is critical to this system. Class system is represented by industrial societies which is associated with high levels of migration to cities, democratic principles, and high immigration rates.

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## 2.3 CLASS SYSTEM

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It was in the seventeenth century that the word ‘class’ entered the English language for the first time. Thomas Blount, a seventeenth-century Catholic, recorded it in his dictionary, *Glossographia* (1665), where it is defined as ‘a ship, or navy, an order or distribution of people according to several degrees. The shift from ‘order’ or ‘station’ to ‘class’ in social sciences can be understood as a dominant influence of the success of natural sciences. In biology the word ‘class’ assumed an equality between the different types of animals and seen as a law of nature whereas in social description it is grafted on the existing divisions and seen as an act of history. Another explanation for the entry of ‘class’ into the English language in the mid-seventeenth century is that this was a decisive moment in the development of capitalism. Along with, the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie (owners of means of production) showed that social position was no longer dependent on birth but effort. The word ‘class’, in other words, is linked to fundamental changes in the economy and to their effect on social relations. In brief, the older vocabulary of ‘order’ or ‘station’ (derived from the Latin *stare*, to stand) projected an essentially harmonious view of society whereas the new idiom of class was an expression of social conflict.

### 2.3.1 Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883)

Marxism for the first time gave a scientific explanation of the essence of classes, the reasons for emergence and the ways of its abolition. Marx called the class who owned the means of production the bourgeoisie and the class who sold their labour powers the proletariat. He associated the existence of classes with specific historical phases of development of social production. These are Primitive Communism, Ancient Society, Feudal Society and Capitalist Society.

Marx scientifically proved the historically transient nature of class divided societies and showed why and when class divided society will be abolished by a classless society. Marx convincingly proved that capitalist society is the last society in human history with antagonistic classes. The path leading to classless society, he maintained, lies through the proletariat’s class struggle against all forms of oppressions to protect the interests of all working people. Marx introduced topographical metaphor of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ in which the economic

foundations of a society refer to ‘base’ for determining ‘superstructure’ of a society, that is, politics, laws, culture and education which correspond to definite forms of social consciousness. Marx’s concept of class struggle was based on his analysis of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in industrial society and therefore, one has to be careful about applying it to earlier periods.

<b>Society</b>	<b>Economy</b>
Primitive communism (Classless Society)	Hunting and gathering economy – a subsistence economy where production is to meet basic survival needs. Every member was both producer and owner as it is based on community ownership. Division into masters and slaves. (Classes emerge when productive capacity expands beyond the level of subsistence)
Feudal Society (Class Society)	Trading and mercantile economy. Emergence of concept of private property. Division into lords and serfs
Capitalist Society (Class Society)	Industrialisation. Division into bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Marx distinguished between a ‘class in itself’ and a ‘class for itself’. A class in itself is simply a social group whose members share the same relationship to the forces of production. Marx argues that a social group only fully becomes a class when it becomes a class for itself which can only happen through class consciousness and class solidarity as these two components assist members to realise the strength of their collective action to overthrow the control of the ruling class. Marx and Engels reiterated that the working class as the main social force is capable of eliminating the capitalist system and creating a new, classless society free of exploitation.

#### **Box**

A social group is a collection of people which interact with each other and share similar characteristics and a sense of unity. For example, friends, peers, neighbors, classmates, sororities, fraternities etc.

A social category is a collection of people who do not interact but who share similar characteristics. For example, men, women, and the elderly. A social category can become a social group when the members in the category interact with each other and identify themselves as members of the group.

In contrast, a social aggregate is a collection of people who are in the same place, but who do not interact or share characteristics. For example, a mob.

### **2.3.2 Max Weber (1864-1920)**

The German sociologist Max Weber is responsible for one of the most important developments in stratification theory, there are similarities and differences between Marx and Weber’s approaches. Like Marx, Weber sees class in economic terms. Marx saw class divisions as the most important source of social conflict.

Weber's analysis of class is similar to Marx's, but he discusses class in the context of social stratification more generally. The emphasis in Weber's definition of class falls not on production but on the constraints operating on a person's ability to earn a high income, to purchase high quality goods and to enjoy enhanced 'personal life experiences' (Weber, 1948 & 1993). He defines class as one dimension of the social structure.

Weber further argues, 'class situation is ultimately market situation' (ibid.) whereas status is defined in terms of honor or prestige; hence it is perfectly possible for a person working in a low paid job but holding a high prestige factor, like a priest, and vice versa. Weber writes that the class 'are stratified according to their relations to production and acquisition of goods' whereas the status' are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special style of life (ibid.). These styles of life give status groups a strong sense of their own identity and unify them in contrast to classes where one problem is absence of either tangible or intangible symbolic of class consciousness, how it arises and what forms it takes. In short, the concept of status is premised on social stability due to the existence of sense of identity attached with common life style and consumption. Moreover, status is a more accurate description of social division before the term 'class' was introduced in the mid-seventeenth century. It does not mean that economic divisions did not exist, but that we cannot understand them in terms of Marxist conception of class.

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## 2.4 GENDER

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Most people agree that both the natural and the social shape us as individuals but some suggest that the natural is more important while others argue that social factors are most influential in making us who we are. In this context, it is important to understand what differentiates sex from gender. Anna Oakley (1972) in the early 1970s, defined sex as biological difference between males and females while gender as socially produced difference between being feminine and being masculine. She extended her ideas by engaging the concept of socialisation to try to understand how gender is learned and how femininity and masculinity are socially constructed. The word gender was borrowed from the social psychologist, Robert Stoller who worked on individuals with ambiguous genital sex (Jackson, 1998). Oakley adapted the term to refer to the social classifications of 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Oakley, 1985). Oakley (1972) assumes that sex (biological difference) is the basis of gender distinctions but disputes that biology is destiny. It is through social institution, the message about how to be a boy and how to be a girl is communicated.

Social environments and circumstances determine the meaning of being a woman (or man). In locating and understanding the life of an individual (either man or woman) on this basis, anthropologists often use cultural comparison. The classic anthropological study of differences between women and men is Margaret Mead's (1962/1950) *Male and Female*, where she argued that whatever men do in particular culture is always valued more than what women do. Her early work on *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (Mead 1963/1935) argued that there was a range of different meanings of femininity and masculinity in different cultures. The Tchambuli tribe in New Guinea considers 'masculine'

what most westerners regard as 'feminine'. In that tribe Mead observed that it is the men who adorn themselves. Tchambuli women are dominant partners and men are emotionally dependent on them. Mead noted that the Arapesh of New Guinea regards both the women and men as 'inherently gentle, responsive and co-operative' (Mead, 1963/1935).

It is important to recognise that the very tendency to categorise femininity and masculinity as opposite and mutually exclusive categories might be a western way of thinking. There are indeed cultures where more than two categories of sex/gender exist (Herdt, 1994).

### 2.4.1 Emergence of Women's Movement

Women have always protested against their oppression in some way, and individual writers and thinkers throughout the ages have often devoted their attention to women's plight; but it was only in the nineteenth century that women began to organise themselves in order to fight for the emancipation of the female sex as a whole. The ideological origins of feminism must be sought in the eighteenth-century intellectual 'Enlightenment'. The thinkers of the Enlightenment rejected the view that revelation from God was the source of all knowledge.

Many of the leading philosophers of the late eighteenth century devoted at least some attention to the question of women, marriage and the family. The German writer Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel provides a good example. Hippel produced a book, entitled *On the Civil Improvement of Women* (1794) which besides being regarded as the beginning of the literary debate on women's place in society in Germany also has a more general interest and significance. The feminists in the French Revolution were really a marginal phenomenon. The mass of women who participated in the great bread riots and street battles of the revolution had no time to think of the theories of enlightenment feminism; they were too busy simply trying to feed themselves and their families. Feminism remained a predominantly literary phenomenon in France for many decades.

Women's struggle to improve their position have a long history, there have been two periods of particularly noticeable mass activity, which are referred to as the first wave and the second wave of feminism. The first wave in the nineteenth century was principally a liberal call for women's inclusion within public life - a demand for the vote and for entry to university and the professions (Rendall, 1985).

The second wave from the 1960s until the early 1980s in Paris arguably had a more revolutionary agenda and contained the more recent debates about representing gendered interests. Second wave feminism began to emerge in about 1968 as masses of women began struggling for 'liberation' from patriarchal dominance. The feminists of second-wave questioned divisions between private and public spheres, highlighted the political nature of relations between women and men, experimented with new political processes and re-wrote political agendas to attend to issues they thought central to women (Holmes, 1999).

There were variety of demands made by feminist groups with different ideas and priorities, but there was considerable common ground. Some of these demands could be summarised as follows: equal pay; equal education and opportunity,

twenty-four hour childcare, free access to contraception and abortion. The movement was an amazing collection of women of different classes, ethnic groups, ages, sexualities and so on.

In many respects the second-wave feminist movement, as with the first wave, was based on the idea that women shared a common, disadvantaged social position; that as women they had similar experience of being treated as second-class citizens. Therefore their key identity was of a woman. Political unity between women was possible if they recognised this common identity and their shared oppression.

Nancy Hartsock (1998) is well known for her intellectual rendering of this common early second-wave position, albeit she posits Marxist arguments for why women share common experiences, whereas within political activism feminists tended to refer rather more vaguely to women's shared oppression under patriarchy. She believes there is a feminist standpoint, which emerges because women share a worldview based on their common material social position. In this extension of Marxian theory she proposes that women's reproductive activity, or close relation to that activity, makes them critical of patriarchy as partial and overly abstract, and relations within patriarchy as lacking connection. Because women are likely to be concerned with caring for others—be it children, husbands or elders, they are aware of the limitations of patriarchy's emphasis on individuals and competition. However, this does assume that all women are similarly involved in, or connected to, the reproductive activities of caring. Even if women do share similar experiences do they necessarily share the same ideas about how to address politically those experiences?

Ever since women have questioned their social position they have had varying ideas about what women want and need. This does not mean that women do not know what they want but that there are many different kinds of women, who have differing degrees and types of privilege or disadvantage according to their age, class, ethnicity, sexuality, region, religion and so on. A mass movement seemed to rely on unity, but there was also a need to have respect for difference among women.

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## 2.5 CLASS AND GENDER

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Different forms of inequality have often been separated out because it is extremely difficult to try to think through how inequality may be simultaneously gendered, racial, and classed. Class is the main concept used within anthropology to theorise social inequality. Class analysis has dealt with three main issues. Firstly, the determination of the distinction between class categories and the allocation of people to them; secondly the understanding of mobility between classes and thirdly the implications of class position and class mobility for political, class, action and social consciousness.

Traditionally class analysis has ignored gender relations. In the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s most writers on class ignored gender relations (Beteille, 1977; Lockwood, Goldthrope et al, 1969; Blackburn and Mann, 1979; Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn, 1980; Goldthrope, 1980). They rarely felt it necessary to establish the reasons for this, at best using resource constraints, in a footnote, to justify an all-male sample (Blackburn and Mann, 1979). The first full defense of the

omission of gender was presented by Goldthorpe in 1983. This approach had faced numerous criticisms of class theory for its sexist bias (Acker, 1973; Delphy, 1984; Garnsey, 1978; Murgatroyd, 1982; Newby, 1982; West, 1978). Goldthorpe substantiates his position on gender using data from the Oxford Mobility Survey.

### **2.5.1 Assumption of Classical Class Analysis and Gender**

Classic class analysis had made several invalid assumptions when categorising women (Acker, 1998/1973: 22). We discuss each in detail below in the following four paragraphs.

#### **2.5.1.1 Unit of Analysis to Define Class**

In the classic class analysis the family as the unit for classifying people's class is used. But it ignores class difference between women and men that might occur within the families. Goldthorpe's defense for women's omission from class analysis is associated with classic class analysis as he argues that women can be ignored because the family, not the individual, is the basic unit of social stratification. He suggests that in all important respects members of a family share the same life chances. But this stand of the classic class analysis raises questions; for example, a bank executive (female) may marry a government teacher (male). How then can the class of the resulting family be accurately determined? Or a husband may lose his job soon after marriage and a wife continues with her occupation then how the class of the resulting family can be defined. Other types of household composition include: single-parent households, usually headed by women; single-person households; unemployed households in which no one has paid work. Further the proposition of traditional households is steadily declining.

So it is needed to argue that why in most cases the husband's class (occupational earning) was thought to determine the class of the unit (Acher, 1998/1973). In order to overcome these difficulties the conventionalists accepted the woman as the head of household in the absence of man in the family and were opened to introduce a second method of classification of women, so that women can oscillate between having a class position in their own right determined by their employment and having their class position determined by their husband when they have one. This oscillation reduces the robustness of class analysis.

#### **2.5.1.2 Breadwinner Model**

Class position is derived from the occupational position of a person's job. According to Goldthorpe absence of mention of gender in classic class analysis is because of the position of the women is determined by that of the man with whom they live, either husband or father. He argues further that the position of the family is determined by that of the breadwinner which is mostly male. He suggests that women do not bring resources of any significance to the family so do not need to be taken into account in determining the class status of the family unit. This assumption is based on a male breadwinner/ female housewife model of the family that has always been largely restricted to middle class families able to survive on a single wage. Besides this, significant numbers of people do not live in traditional nuclear families of the male breadwinner, wife and children model (Acker, 1973). This model does not apply to working class families where women have always engaged in paid work or to more financially comfortable



families where women have wished to work. In some cases where women work, their status may be higher than their husband's or partner's (McRae, 1986). Britten and Heath (1983) argue that households derive their class position from the employment of both husband and wife, not husband alone. Britain cross-class families are of the commonest type where the spouses have jobs in different class categories. For example a skilled manual worker male, who is classified as working class, is married to female routine white-collar worker, who is classified as middle class. This new classification of household will take more time to grow and merge in Indian society, which is a complex amalgamation of caste and class.

### **2.5.1.3 Women Employment and Definition of Class**

Women's employment is too 'limited', 'intermittent' and 'conditioned' by that of their husbands, to affect the position of the family as a whole. Goldthorpe suggests that women move in and out of employment in relation to domestic events and their husband's jobs. So gender inequalities are irrelevant to how stratification systems are organised. Today women typically take one break of five years from paid employment while having children (Martin and Roberts, 1984). Such a short break does not constitute an 'intermittent' work history, but rather one of continuity. Women's employment also brings significant, not limited, income into the household. However, most models of class failed to note that occupational opportunities open to women are delimited and devalued by those gender inequalities. Jobs defined as women's work continue to be of lower status and the average amount of pay they receive is less than the average for men (Armstrong et al., 2003; Charles and Grusky, 2004). Occupationally based class categorisation originally ignored such differences between what was labeled 'men's work' and 'women's work'. It also ignored evidences showing that when women and men did work in the same jobs, gender discrimination often prevented women from reaching the highest levels (Catalyst, 2006; Hymowitz and Schellhardt, 1986). These gaps in the classic class analysis are liable in giving altered or wrong presentation of women's social position.

### **2.5.1.4 Division of Labour at Household**

Another problem with the classic class analysis is that it fails to theorise inequalities based upon a division of labour within the household. There are other serious inequalities within the household which theories of social inequality need to articulate. For instance, women spend more hours on housework than men; have less access to household goods; have less money and time for leisure, and so on. The link between material position and political action is the central question for class analysis and it is unfortunate that women's material position through gendered political action has not been addressed by the classic class analysis.

The assumptions associated with classic class analysis are found to be invalid when applied to women and it incites feminists to rethink how to explain women's class position. It could be possible if feminists approach the issue of gender and class by asking how the concept of class can be used to theorise gender relations rather than grafting women into class analysis.

Thus, it is important to recognise that ‘women’ are a category of persons who continue to share material disadvantages as a group. A shared social identity as ‘women’ is argued to continue to play a large part in understanding inequalities, but not all women are equally disadvantaged. This unit focuses on the material aspects of inequalities in relation to class. The term ‘material’ originally referred to relations of production and mainly tries to deal with how gender was understood to connect to those relations.

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## 2.6 FEMINISM AND PERSPECTIVE ON CLASS AND GENDER

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Feminism has a tremendous impact on the analysis of the economy. Whole new areas of activity were declared, such as work, in particular housework (Oakley 1974; Silva 2000), also conceptualised as domestic labour, a domestic mode of production (Delphy and Leonard, 1984) and more recently as care-work (Armstrong, 2006). Feminist ideas led to the reworking of the analysis of paid work and its transformation (Irwin 2005; Walby 1997; Scott et al. 2010). New forms and practices of gender inequality were analysed, including women’s unemployment as a reserve army of labour, occupational sex segregation (Witz 1992), part-time work and issues of time flexibility, all of which had implications for the analysis of inequality in employment more generally. The intersection of gender with class has been a long-running theme. This section deals with different feminist perspectives and the feminist interpretation of economical dimension.

### 2.6.1 Radical Feminism

Radical feminists argued that male control of women’s sexuality was a key factor in women’s oppression. Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone are the more visible of the first radical feminist theorists. Millet undertook the rather daunting task of explaining the causes of women’s oppression. Her explanation took women’s domination by men (patriarchy) as central to their social position. This inferior position, according to Millet, was not a product of ‘natural’ differences between women and men. Instead she rigorously examined the socio-cultural production of women by redefining the concept of politics. Millet provides a broad theory of how patriarchy operates through ideology (for example, myth and religion), institutions (for example, family, education, economy) and force (for example, wife beating and rape). Although she recognises class and race as variables in women’s oppression, she tends to emphasise that all women are subject to oppression by men.

Radical feminism attempted to highlight women’s experiences by going beyond purely economic explanations of women’s oppression to include ideology, and literary and other representations of women. In order to overcome that oppression radical feminists were not content to reform the present system, they envisaged a more revolutionary overturning of present ways of thinking about and organising the world. The typical labeling of feminism as liberal, socialist, or radical, best describes British feminism (Holmes, 1999), although these labels do have some relevance for feminism in other Commonwealth Nations (Beasley, 1999). In America radical feminism is sometimes also called cultural feminism (Echols, 1989). Even with Britain and America these labels do not always fit all those who had been involved in the feminist movement from the 1960s onwards.

## 2.6.2 Material Feminism: Marxist Feminism

Hartmann argues that Marxist class categories are 'gender-blind': 'Marx's theory of the development of capitalism is a theory of the development of "empty places"... The categories of Marxism cannot tell us who will fill the empty places.' (Hartmann 1981). Marxist attempts at a solution to the 'woman question', she argues, have all suffered from a basic and fundamental flaw in that ultimately, woman's oppression has been conceptualised and understood as but a particular aspect of class oppression (e.g. Engels, Zaretsky, Dalla Costa). Marxist asserted that there is a link between women's oppression and the system of exploitation of our society or 'the link between the forms of oppression of women and the organisation of production in the society (Beechey and Allen 1982).

### Box

Socialist and Materialist feminists draw their political theory from Marxist materialism, which argues that 'the determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of immediate life' (Engels cited in Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978). Materialist feminism signaled the adaptation of Marx's methods rather than simple adoption of Marx's ideas as in Marxist Feminism (Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997). Socialist feminism was perhaps also an adaptation, but it described the more politically active aspects of materialist feminism rather than the theoretical approach (Beasley, 1999; Jackson, 1998).

Five French women dealt with economic analysis of the relation between gender and class in French forms of materialist feminism, which were developing alongside the Anglo-American versions. They were Monique Wittig, Christine Delphy, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, Colette Guillaumin and Monique Plaza. These women produced the ground-breaking journal *Questionnes F'eministes* with Simone de Beauvoir in the 1970s. Christine Delphy's work has been perhaps most renowned and of most utility to sociologists. Her key approach is initially outlined in her essay on 'The Main Enemy' first published in 1970.

Hartmann accepts the radical feminist account of patriarchy as constituting an independent system of domination, yet she is reluctant to abandon class theory altogether. In Hartmann's account, Marxist analysis is presented not as incorrect, but rather as incomplete. Marx did not acknowledge the role of domestic labour within society. Apart from this, Marxist theory also does not explain why it is women that do domestic labour and, if that is unclear, it is also unclear why women should be the reserve army (Jackson, 1998). The main problem raised by critics about Marxist feminism is that it is too narrowly focused on capitalism, being unable to deal with gender inequality in pre-and post-capitalism, rather than recognising the independence of the gender dynamic.

Noting the gender-blindness of Marxist approach as women who are not linked with production economy are not being feminists drew on postmodernism and psychoanalysis- especially the vision of meaning and subjectivity these knowledges offered (Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997:7)- in order to forge new approaches to class. This deliberation led for the emergence of the domestic labour debates.

In 1865, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor have suggested that the recognition of domestic labour is necessary and women should be liberated from housework. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1903) claimed that what housewives do at home should be considered as a work, and society should accept its benefits. The early discussions about housework continued with Margaret Reid's pioneering study, *Economics of Household Production*, which had a little influence on the mainstream economy when it was published in 1934. Despite these efforts the role of domestic labour within society has been largely neglected by both mainstream and critical theories until 1960s. Due to the drastic increase in participation of women in labour force, the debate continued under the name of 'New Home Economics'.

Starting from 1960s, women's unequal position within society has been discussed mainly by feminists. In 1970s, housework and gendered division of labour at home were included within the agenda of Marxists. Referring to Althusser's superstructure theory, most of Marxist analyses have concluded that the patriarchy is an ideology, and it is subsidised by 'economic structure'. Early feminist studies (Delphy, 1977, Benston, 1969) and domestic labour debate try to establish a conceptual framework, which investigates the place of patriarchy within relations of production and reproduction.

### **2.6.2.1 Domestic Labour Debates**

Men's domination over women is a by-product of capital's domination over labour. Class relations and the economic exploitation of one class by another are the central features of social structures, and these determine the nature of gender relations. Often it is the family, which is seen as the basis for the need of capital for women's domestic labour in the home (Secombe, 1974). The family is considered to benefit capital in which women have been doing the work of reproducing workers, both by giving birth to them and by feeding, clothing, and caring for them so that they can go out to work. The unpaid labour engaged in reproduction of paid labour has gone largely unrecognised. It is cheap because women as housewives do this for no wage, merely receiving maintenance from their husbands.

#### **2.6.2.1a Use-Value Verses Exchange Value**

Margaret Benston (1969) made the key argument that capitalist accumulation relies not just on paid labour but on women's unpaid labour in the household. In using Marxist concepts to understand women's oppression, she defined 'women' within capitalist conditions by including and making a classic Marxist distinction between use-value and exchange-value. Every 'product' supposedly has a use-value but not all 'products' (or commodities) have an exchange-value – they are worth money on the market. In capitalism where the market is central, there are some commodities that remain outside the market and have only a use-value. The things produced within home, the meals that housewives make, the clothes they sew and so on, are used by the family has use-value without being exchanged on the market. Women's work is defined as within home and of use-value. This is viewed as their primary task and any paid labour that they perform is seen as secondary. However, men's primary task is producing products with exchange-value. Thus, money determines value and unpaid women's housework is not valued in the capitalist system.

To further extend this argument if one calculates the money fetches for the work done by the women, if it is done through the market, like babysitting, professional childcare, cleaning, house management, cooking, washing and so on or if the man's wage is supposed to 'pay' for the woman's household work then it 'pays' very badly. Though women may feel that they do this out of love and do not require payment, nevertheless the fact remains that their work at home is not actually paid- and therefore not valued- is key in making sense of gender inequalities.

### 2.6.2.1b Domestic Mode of Production

In *The Main Enemy*, Delphy argues that an analysis of women's unpaid housework is central to understanding women's oppression. She argues that housewives constitute one class and husbands another. They have a relation of economic difference and of social inequality. She argues that housewives are the non-producing class, husbands expropriating the labour of their wives. Delphy is thus arguing that housework is as much production as any other form of work. She adds that women perform this work under patriarchal relations of production for the benefit of their husbands. Hence husbands are constituted as the expropriating class and housewives the direct producers.

The definition of 'domestic mode of production (DMP)' is the fundamental concept of Delphy's theory (1977). She claims that women are exploited by men under the marriage relationship and men control the output of women's labour. There are two different areas, where men are able to exploit women's labour: Housework and Household work. In both fields, men as household heads exploit women's labour. Therefore, she defines women as a class oppressed by a different class. As an oppressor class, men are the agents and beneficiaries of the subordination of women. Marriage is the ground for men to be able to exploit women since it generates the relations of domination and subordination and due to the gender segregated structure of labour force.

In her later studies, Delphy (1984, 1992) establishes another term different than DMP, 'family mode of production (FMP)' and with such term, she details previous definition of household. FMP refers to the market based production done by the dependent family members such as women and children and as head of family men exploit the labour of dependents in such relation. In addition to that, she details her earlier definition of DMP by using three circles: Production, Circulation and Consumption. She states that actors within family are differentiated by FMP through production, circulation and consumption. Delphy (1992) also highlights the importance of the term gender and emphasises that it is not the biology; it is the social practice which creates gender and oppression is creating the social practice. A physical fact is transferred into a category of thought by social practice.

There is a clear attempt to understand the different characteristic of domestic labour and Delphy attempts to define the role of 'love and emotion' within housework, in her later studies (1984, 1992). At the end of her analyses, she enriches her earlier definition of housework by including cultural work, emotional work, sexual work and reproductive work. In addition to the term 'exploitation', she also uses a new term 'appropriation' to define the men's control over women's labour.

Delphy has been criticised for stretching Marxist concepts of class and mode of production too far from their appropriate usage (Barrett and McIntosh, 1979;

Molyneux, 1979). Her critics argue that there are too many differences between women to be recognised as one class. A Marxist concept of class is based on relations of production, not lifestyle. According to Barrett and MaIntosh (1979) and Molyneux (1979) Delphy confuses the two distinct levels of abstractions with each other: Mode of production and Social formation. They argue further that Delphy use of the concept of mode of production is incorrect. According to them, patriarchy is related with social formation and the reproduction of social formation. They assert that within a Marxist system there can be only one mode of production within a social formation, while Delphy's account is based on both patriarchal and a capitalist mode of production.

Another problem with Delphy's account is that not all women are housewives, so she has been critiqued for a partial theorisation of women's position. She tries to slide past this by suggesting that all women expect to be housewives, we can treat all women as if they are. A theorisation of gender must deal with the fact that some women are full-time housewives, and some are not.

### **2.6.2.1c Sex as Class**

Firestone (1974) also attempts to develop Marxist concepts and theory to build her analysis of women's oppression. She uses a broader concept of class than Delphy: all women are in one, all men in another. Sex is a class. It is not restricted to housewives and husbands. Again the basis is a material one, although she conceptualises this as reproduction, not production. Women are disadvantaged by their position in reproduction-pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding, childcare and so on. Firestone has a theory about non-material aspects of gender relations. She draws upon Marxist notions of the material base determining the political and ideological superstructure.

Firestone has been criticised for biological determinism. But while there is some truth in this it is overdrawn, since she does have a notion that struggle over the means of production will change women's subordination.

### **2.6.3 Dual-System Theory**

Dual-system theory is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theory. Rather than being an exclusive focus on either capitalism or patriarchy, this perspective argues that both systems are present and important in the structuring of contemporary gender relations. Eisenstein (1981) considers that the two systems are so closely interrelated and symbiotic that they have become one. Patriarchy provides a system of control and law and order, while capitalism provides a system of economy, in the pursuit of profit. Changes in one part of this capitalist-patriarchal system will cause changes in another part, as when the increase in women's paid work, due to capitalist expansion, sets up a pressure for political change, as a result of the increasing contradiction in the position of women who are both housewives and wage labourers.

Mitchell (1975) discusses gender in terms of a separation between the two systems, in which the economic level is ordered by capitalist relations, and the level of the unconscious by the law of patriarchy. It is in order to uncover the latter that she engages in her re-evaluations of the work of Freud where she argued for the significance of the level of the unconscious in understanding the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology, which would ostensibly appear to have no material basis in contemporary societies.

Hartmann sees patriarchal relations crucially operating at the level of the expropriation of women's labour by men, and not at the level of ideology and the unconscious. Hartmann argues that both housework and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. These two forms of expropriation also act to reinforce each other, since women's disadvantaged position in paid work makes them vulnerable in making marriage arrangements, and their position in the family disadvantages them in paid work. Hartmann argues that patriarchy pre-dates capitalism, and that this expropriation of women's labour is not new and distinctive to capitalist societies and hence cannot be reduced to it.

One of the many limitations of dual-system theory is with analyses of the three (Mitchell, Eisenstein, Hartmann) discussed here is whether they are able to sustain the duality of capitalism and patriarchy. According to Young (1981) it is an inherently impossible task to establish or sustain an analytic distinction between patriarchy and capitalism. Another problem with 'dual-systems' is that they do not cover the full range of patriarchal structures. For instance, sexuality and violence are given very little analytical space in the work of Hartmann and Eisenstein. Most accounts suggest that either the material level (Hartmann, Eisenstein) or the cultural (Mitchell) is the significant basis of patriarchy. However, radical feminists have contributed primarily to the analyses of sexuality, violence, culture and the state, socialist feminists on housework, waged work, culture and the state.

The question arises is whether the concept of class is useful to understand gender relations. The strength of class concept lies in identifying social inequality and in capturing the material aspect of social inequality. Where as its weaknesses are, firstly that it downplays the significance of non-economic aspects of women's subordination and, secondly, that it comes with a set of baggage that is difficult to drop about its relations to capitalist rather than patriarchal social relations.

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## 2.7 CULTURE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CLASS AND GENDER

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The criticisms of materialist based approaches on class have drawn its association through culture. Culture is the key element in **discursive approaches** which identifies the limitation of Marxism. Within feminist attempts to think about women's class position, material condition tells only part of the story. Many feminists move beyond economic or structuralist theories of class and have turned to the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu.

The concept of capital sits at the centre of Bourdieu's (1985) construction of social space. Capital refers to the different forms of power held by social agents. Bourdieu (1986) identifies various forms of capital (power), including economic (e.g., prestige), linguistic (e.g., vocabulary and pronunciation), academic (e.g., tertiary qualifications), and corporeal (e.g., physical attractiveness). He turns the notion of capital into a metaphor and identifies three main forms: Economic, Cultural and Social capital. Economic capital can simply be described as monetary wealth or assets. Cultural capital is something more abstract but can be thought of as like wealth in the form of ways of thinking and being. Bourdieu argues that middle class ways of thinking and being are privileged. Social capital refers to the connections and networks with others to which people belong. Hierarchies

of class are organised around how much these different capitals are thought to be 'worth'. Symbolic capital is another name for distinction. It is a "unique form of motivation- a resource, a reward" (Booth & Loy, 1999) closely tied up with the concept of status, lifestyle, commitment, abilities on challenging terrain, and difficulty and range of maneuvers.

Pierre Bourdieu had little to say about women or gender with most of his writings framed predominantly in class. In the article "La Domination Masculine", however, Bourdieu (1990) draws upon his ethnographic research into the Kabyle of North Africa to show how "masculine domination assumes a natural, self-evident status through its inscription in the objective structures of the social world", which is then embodied and reproduced in the habitus of individuals (McNay, 2000).

#### **Box**

Habitus is the set of learned and embodied ways of doing and thinking which are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life.. The concept of habitus has been used as early as Aristotle but in contemporary usage was introduced by Marcel Mauss and later re-elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu.

While symbolic, social, cultural and economic capital, are central to the structuring of Bourdieu's conception of social space, gender does not appear in his fundamental structuring principles. Bourdieu (1986) briefly acknowledges that "certain women derive occupational profit from their charm (s), and that beauty thus acquires a value on the labour market".

Diane Reay (1997, 1998, & 2005) has argued that in order to understand how class and class inequalities are lived in gendered ways; it is needed to move beyond an economistic (structuralist) focus to include discourses. Beverley Skegg's (1997) work *Formations of Class and Gender* develops Bourdieu's analysis in order to consider the importance of class in the symbolic construction of gender. Among the working class the notion of respectability is key aspect associated with women, which shapes the way for the construction of class and gender. In her ethnographic study she found that women enrolled on caring courses with the hope to sharpen and convert their limited feminine cultural capital into economic capital. Women are thought to have cultural capital in the form of knowledge of how to care for others and so on. It is not necessary that all women get the chance in caring-related jobs. Even if some do get jobs in caring industry they are often poorly paid and insecure, and respectability is not guaranteed. Apart from this, women are allowed to work in caring-related jobs as it substantiates constructed attributes of femininity and the notion of 'women task' by associating social reward like respectability which reinforces class distinctions.

Lisa Adkins (1995) has explored the labour market as one in which continued prejudices about gender and sexuality as markers of particular types of capabilities help create 'women's jobs' and 'men's jobs'. For example, masculinity is thought to be a marker of physical strength and femininity a marker of pretty pleasantness. She found that in a leisure park men were chosen to operate ride though pressing of a switch though it does not require physical strength. Women were almost employed in the catering jobs after selection on the 'right' kind of appearance, a



kind of feminine prettiness. Her study reveals that not only is women's appearance key to judgments and regulation of them as workers, but that women's sexual labour is also exploited by customers and by their male co-workers. On the basis of her researches Adkins deduce that capitalism is profoundly gendered system. She argues therefore that women are not 'workers' in the same way as men. She found the significance of gender and sexuality in producing advantage to men's labour market.

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## 2.8 SUMMARY

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Initially feminists endeavored to see how class differences between women were difficult to demarcate using traditional class categories based around relationship to paid work. However, by considering gender as it emerged within both relations of production and of reproduction within the household, materialist feminists were able to make some headway in linking gender and class inequalities. But, class is not just about material situation but is a discourse about what and who is valuable and respectable in society. Gender is intertwined with every aspect of class, both material and non-material. Culture in turn provides a way ahead for holistic understanding of gender exploring it from all dimensions of class. It enriches and encourages reorienting and rethinking class inequalities in gendered ways to cover other dimensions, apart from materialistic. It is necessary to ask, should the concept of class be expanded to cover gender inequalities across all other areas, like anger, sexuality, emotions? Sylvia Walby opines that it should not be used to cover non-economic forms of inequality, since to do so would be to twist the concept too far from its heritage; however, Bourdieu's theorisation of forms of 'capital' contributes and encourages including new dimensions in understanding of class and gender relation.

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### **Sample Questions**

- 1) Why has gender been omitted from the classic class analysis? Give reasons.
- 2) When and how women's movement came into existence? What are the different feminist perspectives and which perspective has contributed to the understanding of class and gender relation?
- 3) Discuss the debates, which highlighted the limitation of Marx's analysis of class with respect to gender.
- 4) What is the difference between
  - Sex and Gender
  - Marx and Weber on the concept of class
  - Material Feminism and Social Feminism
- 5) What contribution has culture made in exploring the class and gender relation? Discuss in detail.