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Analysing Classification and its Implications: Inequality, Ideology and Power

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Abstract: *The present paper endeavours to delve into the concept of classification and its pertinence within the realm of social sciences. Through an exploration of existing social science literature in anthropology, and sociology, this analysis undertakes a critical examination of the social and political processes involved in the classification of individuals, identities, groups, categories, and, ultimately, moral and cultural discourses. The potential exists for an ideological "misrecognition" of the historical context, whereby certain categories and concepts are emphasised over others, resulting in the eulogising of specific identities while rendering the articulation of certain forms of inequality impossible. The utility and ramifications of categorization are being discussed.*

Keywords: classification, inequality, ideology, subject, power.

Introduction

Sociologists have wrestled to make sense of disorienting transformations in the power structure effected by capitalist development. Invariably, sociological literature gravitates towards the fundamental inquiry of discerning the nature of power and inequality. A more suitable inquiry would entail elucidating the issue that the term "inequality" denotes. The scholarly examination of inequality is aptly focused on the intricate workings of caste dynamics, gender-based subjugation, perpetuation of class-based advantages, ethnic hegemony, as well as the systematic deprivation and marginalisation resulting from categorization. It is incumbent upon us to engage in a rigorous analysis of the societal and governmental mechanisms for categorisation and classification of persons, groups, communities. The

process of categorization involves the allocation of objects, relations, and concepts to a specific class, while the act of classification is the underlying cognitive mechanism. Classification may be seen as an object of intellectual scrutiny, not the ones that sociologists themselves use to order their data.

The discipline of sociology has long been preoccupied with comprehending the intricacies of social disparities and their evolution over time. As exemplified, the individual responsible for this notion was none other than Karl Marx, who presented a highly discerning and politically impactful examination of the mechanics of capitalism and its ramifications, specifically in terms of estrangement, subjugation, and the exacerbation of social stratification. In a similar vein, Max Weber endeavoured to explicate the mechanics of capitalism through the advent of "rational enterprise," namely bureaucracy. Contemporary sociologists, including Mike Savage, Charles Tilly, David Graeber, Richard Sennett, and Goran Therborn, have undertaken a thorough examination of the operational dynamics of social inequality within present-day societies. In addition, scholars in the field of economics, such as Simon Kuznets, Joseph Stiglitz, and Amartya Sen, have devoted their attention to analysing the intricacies of the capitalist economy, including economic disparities, the impact of globalisation, market regulations, and the evolving role of the state. The issue of inequality holds a pivotal position in the realm of social science, encompassing various facets such as the financial crisis of 2007-8, the rallying cry of the Occupy Wall Street movement ("We are the 99 pr cent, who is the one per cent?"), and the emergence of social movements, particularly in the Global South, that resist the neoliberal dismantling of collectivities.

This paper tries to interrogate the concept of classification and its pertinence within the realm of social sciences. Through an exploration of existing theoretical works on classification in anthropology, and sociology, this analysis undertakes a critical examination of the social and political processes involved in the classification of individuals, identities, groups, categories, and, ultimately, moral and cultural discourses. The potential exists for an ideological "misrecognition" of the historical context, whereby certain categories and concepts are emphasised over others, resulting in the eulogising of specific identities while rendering the articulation of certain forms of inequality impossible. The utility and ramifications of categorization are being discussed.

Inequality as the process of classification, domination, and exclusion

The issue of inequality stands as a pivotal challenge within modern-day societies. Each societal construct possesses distinct methods of arranging

individuals, classes, and groups within a particular framework. The configuration of disparities exhibits a diverse array of manifestations contingent upon the particular social and political milieu. Academics from various fields have delved into the inquiry of social stratification, disparities based on race, gender, caste, and class. The field of social sciences has undertaken various approaches to investigate the essence and attributes of disparate structures of inequality. Economists tend to rely heavily on quantitative equations and abstract conceptualizations of societal phenomena, whereas anthropologists and sociologists prioritise the experiential and processual dimensions of social inequalities. The inflexible structure of discipline has constricted our potential elucidations regarding the presence of disparities. Therefore, it is imperative to scrutinise the ideological foundations of these disciplinary frameworks in the realm of social sciences, in light of the economic and political obstacles that confront the current manifestation of democratic existence.

As of late, it has become customary to obscure the modalities and apparatuses of societal marginalisation and subjugation. In light of the cultural shift and postmodern dialogue, the material circumstances have become incomprehensible, fragmented, and resistant to analytical interpretation. They remain elusive and abstract when viewed through a sociological perspective. The societal repercussion of this particular practice has been to assign designations and categorizations to certain notions, principles, and viewpoints, deeming them obsolete and archaic. Social inequalities have similarly suffered a comparable destiny. In the mid-twentieth century, the concept of modernization theory gained significant traction within both academic and political spheres. The modernization theory's evolutionary and linear tenets have entrenched certain social and political concepts as axiomatic. The notion of social mobility has been entrenched in the discourse of a laudatory narrative of contemporary nation-states and the corresponding economic enterprise of capitalist markets that endeavour to establish an unobstructed and liberated social sphere, wherein individuals from all walks of life can ascend to the pinnacle of success. The concept of the "mobility narrative" was deliberately adopted by the socioeconomic and political upper echelons of both the Western and Eastern hemispheres, in light of the expanding global markets. The notion of social mobility has gained prominence as an academic discourse, in tandem with political discourse, as a means of negating the systemic perpetuation of class-based inequities within capitalist labour markets. Through the promotion of the concept of upward social mobility for the impoverished and the middle-class desire to ascend to the upper echelons of society, a clever strategy was employed to

entice the masses to embrace the ostensibly democratic and inclusive nature of the capitalist system. However, it is important to note that this system actually perpetuates and reinforces pre-existing social hierarchies, including those based on race, gender, and caste. Put simply, the classification of social and cultural spheres was utilised to gain popular legitimacy and maintain an unequal order while simultaneously denouncing the possibility of revolution.

Over the course of the last thirty years, scholars have rekindled their fascination with scrutinising the patterns of disparity both in the northern and southern hemispheres of the world. Upon closer examination of a specific academic discipline, it has been noted that endeavours have been made to chart and scrutinise the configuration of disparities. Interestingly, the classification of class has been relegated to the periphery and even deemed obsolete or extinct. Can it be primarily repudiated as a matter of representation or empirical evidence? In the event that such concepts as "class" or "elite" are not employed, it becomes imperative to inquire as to the means by which contemporary manifestations of inequality may be comprehended and scrutinised. The demise of the social construct of class, as a representation of reality, has been declared by esteemed scholars such as Malcolm Waters and Jan Pakulski in 1995. However, it is important to note that the objective reality of class inequality persists and flourishes even in Western societies. Recent empirical studies conducted by sociologists such as Mike Savage, Goran Therborn, and Erik Olin Wright have demonstrated the persistent importance of both material and social disparities, as exemplified by social class, in various contexts including those of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. The persistence of material disparities has posed a persistent challenge to the liberal ideals of a socially equitable and unrestricted world. As per the views of numerous postmodern intellectuals, the conclusion of the Soviet regime marked the anticipated termination of history. The aforementioned transition has been denoted as a novel stage of capitalism, albeit one that lacks the traditional stratification of societal classes. The contemporary upsurge in the examination of inequality and elite analyses indicates that the absence of attention given to elites in academic and political discourse can be traced back to fundamental historical, theoretical, and ideological inconsistencies concerning the essence of socio-economic changes (Savage & Williams 2008; Piketty 2020; Beri 2020). It may be prudent to delve into the incongruity present in the theoretical discourses concerning inequality and categorization as a fundamental tenet. The potential exists for the recognition of ideological misinterpretation of historical context and the imposition of specific

categories and concepts, which may result in the glorification of certain identities while neglecting others, ultimately hindering the ability to address certain forms of inequality.

Against this historical context, Piketty's seminal work, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) emerged. The work in question has garnered significant attention and acclaim for its cogent and discerning examination of the issues of disparity, the apportionment of resources, and the economic system of capitalism as it exists in the present day. Piketty posits that to engage in discourse and unveil the intricacies of disparity, one must first grasp its fundamental ideological composition. In his recent publication, *Capital and Ideology* (2020), Thomas Piketty methodically contests numerous theoretical postulations of economists regarding the issue of inequality. The author's extensive inquiry into the perpetuation of disparities across various societies posits the necessity of a novel, all-encompassing egalitarian discourse to effectively counteract the prevailing ideology of inequity. As per Piketty's assertion, disparities are not solely rooted in economic or technical factors, but rather are fundamentally shaped by ideological and political forces (Piketty 2020: 7-8). Ideological frameworks serve as essential rationalisations to render the experience of inequality tolerable. The phenomenon of naturalising inequality has been the focal point of sociological investigation. To elucidate, sociology reveals how particular manifestations of power dynamics and imbalanced relationships are deemed as inherently innate, as though there exists no ideological underpinning to this purported "naturalness." Piketty posits that the justification of inequalities is a necessary component for any given society to validate its existence. His work offers a thorough analysis of the diverse approaches employed by different societies in achieving this objective, spanning a range of what he refers to as "inequality regimes."

Classification as a Principle of Vision: Producing & Legitimizing Inequalities

The popular description of the classification suggests that it is the inherent inclination of the human mind is to engage in the act of classification or categorization. It is worth noting that certain classifications within the realm of commerce and public administration lack a prescribed structure or conform to uniform benchmarks. Throughout our professional endeavours, a considerable amount of time is dedicated to the categorization of various entities, often employing surreptitious methods, and necessitating the creation and execution of a diverse array of impromptu classifications. Humans

tend to categorise various entities based on their chromaticity, dimensions, calibre, utility, and other distinguishing features. The categorization of groups is accomplished through the application of various criteria such as nomenclature, gender, social hierarchy, cultural heritage, linguistic affiliation, geographical location, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status. As individuals, we are subject to classification by various entities such as other individuals, groups, institutions, markets, and the state. In the realm of commerce, individuals are bestowed with novel appellations such as "premium customer," "cheap buyer," "rentier," "shopkeeper," "client," and the like. Our classification encompasses the religious affiliations of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. We are additionally categorised as either local, non-local, citizen, illegal migrant, or other such classifications. As human beings, we possess the innate ability to categorise and classify various entities that surround us, ranging from residential abodes to material possessions, urban metropolises to rural hamlets, and even entire nations. However, what are these classifications and categories exactly? If they are social construct or product, what is the process of their formation and maintenance? By whom are they authored and vested with the power to effectuate alterations? At what point do these phenomena manifest themselves, and which variables are implicated in their emergence? What is the mechanism behind their widespread prevalence? What is the correlation, per se, between categories that are formed locally and tailored to the spatial constraints of a bathroom cabinet, and those that are commodified, intricate, and exorbitant, as developed by medical diagnoses, government regulatory bodies, and pharmaceutical companies? It is indeed remarkable that despite the profound impact that these feeble yet ubiquitous entities have on our existence, a great many of us remain oblivious to the social and ethical framework that they have established. The undeniable impact of their influence, as cogently expounded by Foucault, is inescapable. As a rudimentary investigation, try by disregarding your gender classification and utilising the lavatories in closest proximity; endeavour to locate a book that has been misfiled under an erroneous library catalogue number; queue up for immigration at a bustling airport in a foreign nation san the appropriate passport, and so forth. These instances serve as illustrations of how easily mistakes can be made when one is not exercising attentiveness. The inherent potency of categorical constructs shall invariably and expeditiously manifest. From a public policy standpoint, it is imperative to acknowledge the equal significance of categorizations such as regional distinctions, types of activities, and natural resources. The designation of a territory as environmentally significant and the classification of another location as

industrial or residential hold considerable sway over forthcoming economic determinations. Whilst the fundamental principles of decision-making in this domain are often the topic of fervent political discourse, they are seldom discernible. The process of altering established categories is generally a laborious and intricate bureaucratic undertaking.

Tracing Durkheim, Bourdieu, and Foucault one can argue to reflect upon and understand the mode of classification that defines certain individuals, groups and communities as such and how the former indulge in struggles against definition and classification. This politics of classification is crucial to make sense of inequalities in neoliberal contexts where new categories are constructed and certain old categories are deemed unfit to explain inequality, the class being one of them. Only categorization makes social life conceivable, or it exemplifies the execution of continual classifications. This means that we continually make assumptions regarding the group into which we categorize the individual with whom we interact. In order to live a social life, social agents categorize common objects. Social science analyses society that classifies everything. Simultaneously, we must relook at the politics of classification and struggling groups against the classification as a linked process that keeps renewing itself in different times. That would require a renewed social science interest in politics of knowledge. We must ask in clear philosophical and empirical terms:

i.   What is the problem that classification addresses?

ii.   How to address inequality in the midst of individuation of life, and

iii. How do social groups challenge the classification imposed on them?

Around the turn of the 20th century, anthropologists shifted their focus from epistemological problems regarding the "truth" of classes to ontological ones regarding how classifications and their associated categories establish and maintain social interactions. Durkheim and Mauss, in their seminal work "Primitive Classification" of 1903, posited the notion that the social derivation of our world's organisational and categorical forms is a concept of paramount importance. In a manner akin to Durkheim's earlier critique of the psychologists of his era, who attributed the causes of suicide to the individual psyche, they contend in this treatise on classification that the ability to classify is not inherent to human nature, but rather arises externally from society. Durkheim and Mauss have arrived at the conclusion that social categories were the fundamental categories of human thought, based on their examination of three distinct societies: Australian tribes, North American Indians, and Chinese society. The phenomenon of social

differentiation, wherein entities and collectives are categorised based on their unique characteristics, is indicative of the intricate social dynamics that exist between them. The process of classification is predicated upon the demarcations that exist among various societal cohorts.

As per Bourdieu's scholarly work titled *Classificatory Struggles* the classification of individuals cannot be restricted within the bounds of objective measurement techniques. Rather, it is a product of the ongoing conflicts that take place over and against these classification systems as they are manifested in the real world. As per Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the concept of class is inherently relational in nature, and the emergence of social classes is contingent upon the struggles waged against systemic exploitation and injustice. Pierre Bourdieu's critical scrutiny of the epistemological foundations of various classification systems stands as a significant contribution to the early sociological analysis. One of the fundamental duties of sociology is to observe and analyse the divisive principles that operate within a given social context. The task at hand necessitates the cultivation of a certain level of self-control in regards to acknowledging the significance of nomenclature, the injurious nature of categorizations, and the consequential outcomes of classification procedures. Bourdieu's contribution to the sociology of classification lies in his elucidation of the persistence of social class hierarchies in ostensibly less stratified contexts of liberal democratic welfare states in post-War II Europe. Through his work, he offers a comprehensive and nuanced account of the underlying mechanisms that sustain these hierarchies. It has been observed that class hierarchies manifest not only in the realm of labour and capital disputes, but also in the domain of "cultural struggles," wherein the assimilation of unique symbols and expressions of authority, as well as the attainment of cultural proficiencies, play a significant role.

According to Beverley Skeggs (2004), the process of categorising and recording social disparities operates via corporeal means, institutional mechanisms, and evaluative frameworks. As an illustration, the concept of inscription pertains to the physical marking of the body, as well as the attribution of qualities and signs. Institutionalisation, on the other hand, involves the establishment of positions, designations, and domains. A positive institutional act involves the assignment of worth, while a negative institutional act entails the deprivation of dignity. Additionally, the notion of exchange involves the attribution of value to a particular behaviour, act, or point of view. The middle class's ability to establish a system for evaluating the worth of individuals, actions, and items is a key method of justifying their authority. This is exemplified by the current discourse surrounding

those who rely on complimentary resources and the potential risks this practise may pose in the long run. The middle class tends to criticise the state's welfare initiatives aimed at providing fundamental necessities to underprivileged segments of society through the pejorative labels.

The classification of objects and the correlation of such categories with social structure has been a prominent subject of inquiry in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and cognitive sciences. The scholarly work conducted by Bowker and Star (2000) delves into the intricacies of classification systems within the realm of information systems, examining both their design and utilisation. Their inquiries pertain to fundamental inquiries regarding the diverse facets of categorization. In the quotidian sphere, bureaucratic regulations, ontological perspectives, communal structures, financial frameworks, and cultural paradigms persist within the realm of textual categorization, albeit in an implicit manner. As one delves into the narratives surrounding conflicts and compromises among groups vying for recognition of their community identity, work lives, or administrative categorization, a delicate balance must be struck between the formal and informal aspects of classification. Upon scrutinising the progression or metamorphosis of classification systems employed in any domain of societal existence, one can peruse and investigate a significant quantity of social, political, and economic contexts inherent in these classifications and categorizations.

Mary Douglas highlights a salient characteristic of classification systems, namely their emergence from and perpetuation by social arrangements (Douglas 1986). The act of classification pertains to the systematic arrangement of the social realm, taking into account its spatial, temporal, or spatial-temporal dimensions. A classification is a hierarchical arrangement of entities, encompassing objects, occurrences, connections, persons, and undertakings, that serves the purpose of fulfilling bureaucratic obligations for territorial delineation or organisation, or for the generation of knowledge. Standards are integral constituents of the modes of categorization. Frequently, the systems under consideration undergo a process of standardisation. Moreover, a standard can be viewed as a mechanism for categorising the universe. The concepts of classification and standards are inextricably linked. A "standard" refers to a collection of mutually accepted regulations that govern the creation of either written rules or physical criteria.

Bowker & Starr (2000) stress the pivotal role of standards in facilitating and sustaining industrial manufacturing. Simultaneously, akin to classifications, these standards' dimensions are, to some extent,

conceptualised as idealised. They encapsulate objectives of praxis and manufacturing that are invariably imperfectly actualized. The categorization and benchmarks are two interrelated aspects of a single entity. The standardisation of classifications is contingent upon various factors and may not necessarily come to fruition. In the event that such actions are not undertaken, they shall be deemed ad hoc, confined to a singular entity or a regional populace, and/or of restricted longevity. Simultaneously, each triumphant norm establishes a system of categorization, at minimum, distinguishing between efficacious and ineffectual methods of arranging actions or objects. The pragmatic implementation of standards often necessitates the utilisation of impromptu, nonconforming classifications. The aforementioned were established as official, standardised categorizations and benchmarks, encompassing both empirical and economic aspects. Individuals have historically engaged in the categorization, quantification, and normalisation of a vast array of subjects, including but not limited to fauna, human ethnicities, literature, medicinal substances, fiscal obligations, vocations, and illnesses. The aforementioned categories were established and existed within the domains of industry, medicine, science, education, and government.

The categorization and standardisation of systems represent a convergence of societal structure, ethical principles, and intricate levels of technological assimilation. The primary overarching concept pertains to the omnipresence of categorization and normalisation. The ubiquitous presence of classification schemes and standards pervades our surroundings. Within the constructed environment in which we reside, myriad standards are ubiquitously employed, ranging from the installation of plumbing fixtures in a domicile to the construction of an automobile engine to the transmission of digital data between computing devices.

The fundamental premise of our methodology is that classifications and standards possess both tangible and intangible properties. In what manner do we apprehend this intricately enriched, categorised, and tactually diverse realm? When one is under the influence of cognitive idealism, it becomes effortless to perceive classifications as attributes of the intellect and standards as abstract numerical concepts or cultural legacies that are not firmly grounded. However, their presence exerts a tangible influence within the realm of reality. These entities are inherently integrated and ingrained within each aspect of the constructed milieu. It is evident that a singular classification system cannot be universally applicable to all individuals. A prime example of this is the traffic light system, which utilises the colours red, yellow, and green to convey information. However, this system is not

effective for individuals with visual impairments, as they require an auditory coding system. An additional prominent motif pertains to the revelation of the pragmatic politics that underlie the processes of classification and standardisation.

Episteme and Classification

Foucault's discourse analysis offers valuable insights into the ways in which our institutions and modes of communication are structured and classified. Foucault's classifications are instrumental in unlocking the evolution of the human sciences, a term he employs to denote the pursuit of contemporary human knowledge, encompassing fields such as medicine, linguistics, ethnology, and psychiatry. The advent of a novel or modified hierarchy of social strata signifies a cognitive shift for him. Foucault notes a transition from the structural and all-encompassing interpretation of organic nature, as exemplified by the classificatory medicine of the 18th century, to a more patient-centric approach in the following century. This shift is reflected in the typologies of diseases developed during the 19th century, which were informed by insights gained from clinical observation and dissection of pathological tissues. As per his analysis, the act of isolating knowledge objects through classification not only constructs but also imposes limitations on discourses.

According to Foucault's perspective, classifications transcend beyond being mere conceptual frameworks. Rather he perceives classifications as societal tools imbued with powerful signifiers that are often utilised to *ostracise*, *restrict*, or *detain* individuals deemed "abnormal," due to their tendency to arise from or manifest within institutional procedures, as is evident from his work on prison, and hospitals. Foucault's historical works are abundant with instances that demonstrate the capacity of categories to exert a profound impact on both intellectual and societal domains.

Foucault's seminal historical work, *Madness and Civilization*, traces the trajectory of "the great exclusion" that transpired during the mid-17th century, whereby the mentally ill, the destitute, and the jobless were collectively deemed "idle" and subsequently relegated to asylums. He showcases how the confinement of mentally ill individuals within psychiatric institutions facilitated the regulation and examination of insanity. Over time, the development of innovative methodologies for managing the mentally ill gave rise to a novel discipline of inquiry, namely psychology. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault (1970) compels us to investigate the emergence and function of any given system of specification, with regard to the historical

and institutional contexts in which it is situated. Foucault's principles and inquiries, when applied to the subject of inquiry, can aid in identifying the profound and nearly imperceptible structures that underlie discursive and social transactions. This approach emphasises the importance of classification in understanding the influence of these structures. Pursuant to his reasoning, it could be contended that categorizations serve as both a manifestation and a compass for our cognitive faculties. The manner in which we arrange and prioritise our preferences and desires can be indicative of our cognitive and emotional conditions and conditioning. Foucault's work posits that classifications possess the ability to dispose of the entities they contain. The act of categorization often leads to the subsequent isolation of the object in question. He argues that in the process of isolating objects of knowledge, institutions employ a regulatory framework that involves assigning them to distinct and compartmentalised spaces, such as hospital wards, classrooms, and prison cells, as they undertake the classification of their human subjects (Foucault 1970).

How to study Classification?

Drawing insights from the discussion above, we are sharing some key concerns in relations to the classification. When scrutinising any subject matter pertaining to categorization and classification, it is imperative for a researcher to consider the following paramount concerns. To determining the object of the classification is very important. One should ask does the categorization have an impact on individuals? If so, how? In this particular instance, it is imperative to discern and designate not only the explicit entity being classified, but also the individual subject involved in said classification. Then, one may ask whom or what is excluded by this classification? Does the act of categorising individuals, objects, or concepts into this particular classification confer any advantages or disadvantages upon any particular group? Analyse the distinctions between entities that conform to the established categorization and those that do not. One must inquire as to what the specific inclusion criteria are for the purpose of classification? Upon what basis are particular entities or concepts deemed ineligible for consideration or inclusion. In additional, one can inquire the entity or individual responsible for the development of this particular classification system? By whom is it utilised or adopted? Also to inquire who possess the authorization to utilise or alter this classification? What are the origins of the authoritative basis utilised by the individuals responsible for devising the classification system or those who presently utilise it? Is there any

individual or collective entity that challenges the legitimacy of this categorization or scrutinises its ramifications? Why, what are the implications of this challenges to the new classifications. What was the impact of this classification on the object's understanding or administration? Historical inquiries regarding classification may be undertaken to ascertain the genesis of a given classification system and its subsequent evolution over time.

Determine the spatial classification. In which location was it originally fashioned or modified? It is important to bear in mind that certain categorizations are rooted in societal or institutional customs and are subsequently codified in language. In which social and institutional domains is it presently employed? What is the manner in which it is comprehended or administered in these geographical regions? The implementation of institutional protocols engenders a plethora of classifications that exist in practise. The educational establishments in our society tend to stratify individuals based on a variety of factors such as age, gender, social status, and caste. As a customary practice, students are allocated designated areas based on their age and gender, a convention so ubiquitous that it scarcely warrants acknowledgement.

Sociologists encounter things that are already classified: individuals, groups, institutions. For instance, when we look at administrative classification of Indian population into categories such as SC, ST, OBC, General etc. one can ask the question whether classification is just a bureaucratic construct or it represents community identity. And how over a period of time, a bureaucratic administrative category acquires identity of a social group or even develops group consciousness. We study of classification of people who classify themselves and others. Classification based struggles in popular media have intensified in recent times, e.g. "poor" are defined by the mainstream market norm as lazy, and careless people who are a burden on society and the country because they refuse to contribute anything of value to either society or economy. Politicians keep distributing free-bies for the poor. This burden of moral classification by elites and middle class, attaches negative moral stigma on poor people. Similarly, the recent farmers' movement, where one of the dominant section of rich farmers expressed their anxieties of altering identity. With the acquisition of land by state and corporate agencies, these proud dominant landowning castes feel threatened as this policy might completely change their community identity.

Actively rejecting the judgements of the middle class, subalterns instead engage in revalourization strategies, such as forms of class solidarity in which links forged via local, familial sociality are seen as supportive

connectivities rather than sources of self-accumulation. It is possible to construct a model of class as a struggle that details the ways in which people draw on other values in their fight against class prejudice, something that empirical studies can find out.

Classification and misrecognition as Ideologically constituted

To move ahead to the question of ideology, one can understand the organic link between classification, inequality regimes and ideological frames by asking the question, why and how inequality is "tolerated" and not "resisted" or "challenged". One needs to probe how unequal positions and locations become or termed as questions of "difference" and not hierarchy or exclusion. For many decades, sociologists have been demonstrating the relevance of the ideological justification of unequal relations among different sections of the society. For example, think of the discourse of meritocracy, and social mobility. Michael Young (1958) in his classic, *The Rise of Meritocracy* argued quite authoritatively that individuals are sorted into different occupational positions based on their skills, self-worth, merit and talent, where the later are considered as given and "natural". It has become a very well-organized way of hereditary transfers of privileges, power and resources across generations. Merit and talent have today become the leading social ideals. In Indian context it also gels very well with Brahminical caste and gendered form of hierarchy and exclusion. The discourse has been a medium through which politics of inequality is concealed. It blocks social and economic opportunities for the marginalized via the very category of "mobility" and "openness". In other words, the discourse of meritocracy and entrepreneurship strengthens the production and reproduction of inequality regimes by providing ideological legitimation, justification and rendering it as natural. It ends up blaming the deprived of lacking merit, talent and skills.

Piketty (2014) has explained the dynamics of contemporary capitalism while tracing the patterns of the distribution of income & wealth between and within countries e.g. France, Germany, Britain and also America over the past two centuries. He presents quantitative data collected from tax-records (which allow long-term perspective), historical data provided by World Top Income Database (WTID) and builds on Kuznets' pioneering work evolution of income inequality in America. Also interesting is his usage of distribution tables to analyze inequalities instead of economists' conventional tool, i.e., Gini coefficient. One of the strength of his work is aggregation of national statistics from various sources and their depiction through large time-series.

He demolishes the myth of "meritocratic values" and "principles of justice" usually attributed to American society, by showing that top decile owns 72 per cent of wealth, whereas the bottom half just two per cent, and hence is becoming a society of "supermanagers". The sharp increase in concentration of income is due to rapid increase in "supersalaries" of the top decile.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept, "misrecognition" helps us to understand how one form of asset or capital is utilized for gains in different domain without recognizing it as such. Explained through the category of "symbolic capital", Bourdieu points that this process makes inequalities appear natural/just for everyone while the doxic world of neoliberal economy continues its triumphant march across the globe. Thus, it becomes relevant to make sense of how ideology and misrecognition about inequality structures displace our analytical focus of a problem and blocks any politicization of inequality. In recent times it has been observed that many of our social problems portrayed as the problems of "intolerance" and not as issues of power, domination, exclusion, inequality and injustice and the remedy is proposed via the language of "tolerance", and not political struggle, social movement or resistance (Zizek 2001). Slavoj Zizek succinctly captures this ideological formulation of the problem. According to him, social inequalities, class relations of exploitation resulting from capitalist mode of production, are neutralized and termed as "different ways of living" which cannot be overcome but be adjusted with (Zizek 2001).

Throughout the 1960s, when C. W. Mills was conducting study on American power elites at a period when the idea of "elite" was recovering from its link with "fascism" during the Pareto and Mosca eras. In the post-World War II era, the political tensions of the previous conflict affected the practise of social sciences. The emphasis was on the "rise of the middle classes" in Western Europe. The objective was to delegitimize the "polarisation of class" narrative associated with Marxism. The "embourgeoisement thesis" was ascendant, so the academic focus shifted from studying powerful elites to what was seen as the slow but steady movement of people into the middle class in West Europe and North America. This was related to the narrative of "upward social mobility" of the poor and an understanding of the political and economic ramifications of the "democratization processes".

In the aftermath of these societal upheavals, the empirical criticism of "class analysis" disputed the legitimacy of concepts such as "ruling class" and "power elite." The vast literature demonstrating that the working class is no longer a revolutionary force in England and, subsequently, in European contexts, contributed to the dilution of any critical discussion on who dominates, who monopolizes, and what the social and cultural characteristics

of elites are. The sixth and last blow, in my opinion, was the increasing Foucauldian viewpoint and the notion of a decentred nature of power, an insistence on capillary power that supported the new practices of neoliberal government. All these social, political, and intellectual advancements have led to the evasion of sociological examination by elites. In recent years, sociologists have revived elite studies and resumed their examination of the dynamics of power and inequality in the modern world. (Savage & Williams 2009). Growing privatisation and neoliberal policies have prompted doubts about the character of elites and their aversion to democracies and welfare states. Any academician who attempts to map elite advantages and their social practises is called "leftist" or Maoist as an indication of the narrowing room for critique of economic elites.

In a related vein, the vigorous campaign for the demolition of all democratic institutions worldwide and in India is currently referred to as a "revolt of elites" (Appadurai 2020). The current social and political turmoil provides the opportunity to reject elites' discourse of' meritocracy' and examine critically how they conceal their mechanisms of exclusions and monopolisation of resources, thereby undermining the fundamental principles of democracy-liberty, equality, and fraternity. We have been experiencing a certain stagnancy and dullness in the mainstream political narratives. With the growing implementation of neoliberal economic policies in the country the tenor, language, agenda setting, campaigns related to "market" have acquired a depoliticized character. This brings us to the three major social characteristics of "neoliberal politics" itself as Harvey discussed. Firstly, the neoliberal project is primarily a political project to establish the supremacy of the corporate class over the labour, state and other social groups (Harvey, 2016). It aims to commodify all aspects of human life and put a price tag i.e. monetize everything. In the sphere of politics, neoliberal project silences any critical discussion of economic alternatives and primarily reduces everything to ideological and political manipulations. That's why we see political parties might differ in term of their social and cultural agenda but stand united in their economic policies. The second important element of this neoliberal politics is to reduce all politico-economic problems as the problem of bureaucratic management. In this way no ideological critique is allowed of the mainstream economic planning either of welfarist or socialist kind. This becomes very clear with the tactical slogan of "there is no alternative" popularized globally. Third important element is systematic individualization, fragmentation or generation of cracks in the resistance against neoliberal market model, while the ruling class remains united.

According to Bourdieu, the goal of sociological imagination has always been to reveal the processes of dominance and the rhetoric of power that undermine human freedom and dignity. With the increasing dominance of a neoliberal security state, the true problem is to comprehend, evaluate, and experience how academic research responds to anti-democratic authoritarian conditions, and to revive/resurrect the "critique" from its paralysis. Only by conducting a sociology of privilege and focusing on the engines of inequality, i.e., elites, can we better comprehend how inequality is built and organised. We must comprehend the ramifications of making them invisible. The task of critical social science is to critique the consequences of classificatory systems and the forms of value, judgments and norms they establish in human societies. Social and ideological processes of exploitation, domination, dispossession and devaluation, enable us to see how classificatory practices are not just about the production of differences, but about legitimating power and exploitation.

Conclusion

This paper has mapped the conceptual discussions around classification and inequality. It suggests that the underlying mechanisms of the functioning of classifications need to be systematically examined rather than assuming them in advance. In other words, we need to be reflexive about how we understand and examine mechanisms of inequality and power without questioning of the classificatory cum ideological framework that permeates beneath and hides the mechanisms of inequality. Only a creative sociological imagination can help us in formulating relevant questions to probe into the production of the "stability" and "invisibility" of the mechanisms that lie at the heart of an unequal socio-economic order. The task of demystification of the ideological frameworks of classification and inequality is necessary to lay bare the structures of inequality and to throw a critical reflection on what has become invisible and almost forbidden to talk about.

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