

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

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Name of the Presenter: Dr Priyanka Velip

Notes

Facets of Slavery

Introduction

Inequalities exist in all types of human society. Even in the simplest cultures, where variations in wealth and property are virtually non-existent, there are inequalities between individuals, men and women, the young and old. The study of inequalities in society is one of the most important areas of sociology because our material resources determine a great deal about our lives. Sociologists use the concept of social stratification to describe inequalities that exist between individuals and groups within human society. One such social stratification was an existence of slavery.

Meaning and Definition of Slavery

Slavery is an extreme form of inequality, in which certain people are owned as property by others. The legal conditions of slave ownership have varied considerably between different societies. Sometimes slaves were deprived of almost all rights in law- as was the case in the Southern United States-while in other instances their position was more akin to that of a servant.

In the United States, South America and the West Indies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slaves were used almost exclusively as plantation workers and as domestic workers.

Characteristics of Slave or Slavery

1. Slaves are regarded as items of property.
2. Slaves are considered as movable or immovable property.
3. Slave work for his master without remuneration.
4. Slaves were under the control of their masters or owners.
5. Slaves could be bought or sold in the market.
6. Slaves usually had few rights than others.
7. Slaves were excluded from political positions and the military but were found in most other types of occupation.

Types of Slavery

The British Empire banned slavery in 1833 and the United States did the same in 1865. According to Anti Slavery International (ASI), there are four types of slavery.

1. *Chattel* slavery:

In *chattel* slavery, one person owns another. The number of chattel slaves is difficult to estimate because this practice is against the law almost everywhere. Nevertheless, the buying and selling of slaves still take place in many countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

2. Child slavery:

Child slavery is a more common form of bondage in which desperately poor families let their children take to the streets, where they are readily victimized by others. Perhaps 100 million children from poor countries fall into this category.

3. Debt bondage:

In debt bondage, employers hold workers by paying them too little to meet their debts. In this case, workers receive wages, but not enough to cover the food and housing provided by an employer; to all practical

purposes, they are enslaved. Many workers in sweatshops in poor countries fall into this category.

4. Servile forms of marriage:

Servile forms of marriage may also amount to slavery. In India, Thailand, and African countries, families marry off women against their will. Many end up as slaves working for their husband's family; some were forced into prostitution.

Finally, one additional form of slavery is human trafficking, the moving of men, women, and children from one place to another and then placing them in conditions of forced labour. Women and men brought to a new country on the promise of a job and then forced to become prostitutes or agricultural labourers. Such activity is a big business.

In 1948, the United Nations issued its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms".

Slavery has frequently provoked resistance and struggle from those subjected to it. There were slave rebellions, in some which slaves managed collectively to free themselves from their masters. Slave –labour systems break down partly because of the struggles and because of economic or other incentives motivate people more effectively than direct compulsion.

Today slavery remains a significant human rights violation in the world.

Summary

Slavery was an extreme form of inequality among different groups in a society. Of all patterns of social stratification, it is the system which has drawn the most rigid legal boundaries between members of one group and those of another. Unfortunately, this social evil still exists in society.