



MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIOLOGY

SEMESTER-I

SOC-1.3: CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

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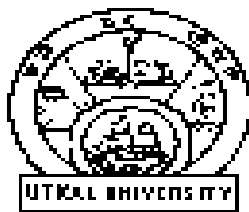
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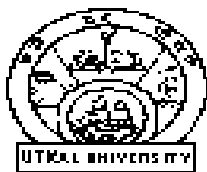
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We wish you happy reading.

DIRECTOR

SOC-1.3: CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

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Unit-01 Law of Three Stages

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- 1.5 Summary**
- 1.6 Self Assessment Questions**
- 1.7 Key Words**
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1.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- Grasp how we moved to positive stage and how progress happened in humansociety
- Define and explain sociology and its aim of discovering social laws
- Understand the significance of sociology
- Explain types of society and evolution of different society

1.2 Introduction/ Assessment of Prior Knowledge

In the previous unit on social static and dynamics, you learnt that Auguste Comte insisted that social order and social change was the two themes that sociology discipline should analyse. In this manner, Comte tried to combine progress and stability and at another level, he tried to reconcile individualism and conservatism. Another inter-related theme is law of three stages in which he explained the manner in which changes were ushered in the human society and linked the progression of human society with the development in the form of knowledge and intellect. In this connection, the present Unit exclusively deals with law of three stages and crucial to this topic is to see how positive knowledge was gained historically.

1.3 Life Sketch and works

Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte, better known as Auguste Comte, was born in Montpellier, Herault, in Southern France on 19th January 1798. After attending the Lycee Joffre and then the University of Montpellier, Comte joined the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris. But two years later the institutions were closed down by the Bourbons. In August 1817, Comte met Claude Henry Saint Simon who appointed him as his secretary. He was thus initiated into politics at a very young age. He published a great number of articles which brought him to the public sphere. In 1824, he broke with Saint Simon. Comte married Caroline Massin and divorced in 1842. In 1826, he was taken to a mental hospital, but left without being cured. He started teaching Course of Positive Philosophy in January 1829 and published six volumes of the Course

(1830, 1835, 1838, 1839, 1841, 1842). Comte developed a close friendship with John Stuart Mill and developed a new “Religion of Humanity”. He published four volumes of “Systeme de politique positive” (1851-1854). His final work, the first volume of “La Synthese Subjective” (The Subjective Synthesis), was published in 1854. Comte died of stomach cancer on 5th September 1857 in Paris. His other works include ‘Elementary Treatise on Analytic Geometry’ (1843), ‘The Philosophical Treatise on Popular Astronomy’ (1844), ‘The Discourse on Positive Spirit’ (1844), and ‘The General View of Positivism’ (1848).

1.4 The Law of Three Stages

‘The Law of Three Stages’ is considered to be the corner stone of Comtian thought. This theory has got the influence of Charles Darwin’s theory of “Organic Evolution”. Auguste Comte organized and classified the social thought prevailing before his times. Comte gave birth not only to a specific methodology of studying knowledge but also analyzed the evolution of human thinking at its various stages. The Law of Three Stages states that society as a whole, and each particular science, develops through three different mentally conceived stages: theological, metaphysical and positive. The main aim of this principle is that it provides the basis of sociological thinking. These stages, he thought, characterized the development of both human knowledge and of society, which correspondingly developed from a military to a legal, and finally to an industrial stage. According to Comte, the evolution of human mind has paralleled the evolution of the individual mind. Just as an individual tends to be a staunch believer in childhood, a critical metaphysician in adolescence and a natural philosopher in manhood, so also mankind in its growth has followed three major steps. The three stages are discussed in detail below:

1.4.1 Theological or Fictitious Stage

According to Comte, in this stage, “all theoretical conceptions, whether general or special, bear a supernatural impress”. People are unaware about the real causes of the natural and social phenomena and they attribute the happenings to imaginary or divine forces beyond their mental reach. This stage is further sub-divided into three sub stages.

a. Fetishism- Here man accepts the existence of spirit or soul. The supernatural powers resided

in the fetishes or mystical qualities attributed to inanimate objects. Hence, 'fetishism' emerged as a form of religion and it admitted no priesthood, because its gods are individuals, each residing in fixed objects.

b. Polytheism- Where the mind of primitive man became better organized, fetishism became cumbersome. Too many fetishes created confusion. Here man begins to believe in magic and allied activities. He then assigns specific objects to possess certain supernatural power and starts worshipping them as god. Man started believing in several gods and created the class of priests to get the goodwill and blessings of all such gods.

c. Monotheism- During this sub stage, man believes that there is only one centre of power which guides and controls all the activities of the world. Thus man believed in the superhuman power of only one god.

1.4.2 Metaphysical or Abstract Stage

This stage is an improvement or extension of the earlier stage. Rationalism started growing instead of imagination. It was believed that the abstract power or force guides and determines the events in the world. Metaphysical thinking discards belief in concrete god. Reasoning helped man to find out some order in the natural world. The continuity, regularity and infallibility found in the natural order were attributed to some principles or power. Thus, principles and theories gained ascendancy over feelings and speculations.

1.4.3 Positive or Scientific Stage

The positive stage represents the scientific way of thinking. As Comte stated, "In the final, the positive stage, the mind has given over the vain search after absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the cause of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws-that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance." Observation and classification of facts marks the beginning of this stage. There is no place for magic or superstition. Everything is viewed rationally. This stage suits the needs of industrial society

1.4.4 Stages in Social Organisation and Progress

Comte not only identified three stages in the development of human thinking but also observed

three stages in the development of society or social organisation. All these modes of thinking-theological, metaphysical and positive-determine and correspond to a particular type of social organisation. This explanation of Comte can be viewed as another important contribution of his sociological thought.

Comte declared that theological thinking leads to a military and monarchical social organisation. Here the God would be the head of the hierarchy and is represented as a mighty warrior. The individuals would be arranged in a military organisation. Divine sanctions are the rules which can hardly be questioned or challenged. Dogmatism would prevail here and its challengers would be punished or threatened with severe punishment.

Metaphysical thinking produces a political system in which the power of the king becomes restricted. The constitutional system of government gets priority. The constitutional changes are gradual and there is a movement towards decentralisation of power. It corresponds to a legalistic social organisation. The medieval social organisation clearly represented this kind of society. Here the natural rights are substituted for divine rights. Priesthood is furthered. Society becomes legalistic, structured and formal. In Europe, nation-states emerged during this stage.

Positive thinking produced a society dominated by industrialists. It leads to an industrial society in which men inquire into the nature and utilisation of the natural resources and forces. Here the main stress is on the transformation of the material resources of the Earth for human benefit, and production of material inventions. In this positive or scientific stage the great thought blends with the great power.

1.5 Summary

Comte suggested that although order and progress had been seen as irreconcilable in the past, their union was the major feature of positive social science (Adam and Sydie 2001). So, through his conception of law of three stages in which he spelt out positive stage we see reconciliation of progress and stability and the task he set out for sociologists.

1.6 Self Assessment Questions

1. Why Auguste Comte is called the founding father of sociology?
2. Who has influenced Comte's law of three stages?
3. What are three of the different stages that society has gone through?
4. How would you critique Auguste Comte's law of three?

1.7 Key Words

Evolution: The process of slow changes through a long period of time in which life forms have developed from simple unicellular beings, such as amoeba, to complex multi-cellular beings, such as human beings.

Metaphysical: Metaphysics literally means that branch of philosophy which investigates the first principles of nature and thought. For Comte it is a stage of development of mind in which the mind explains phenomenon by invoking abstract entities or forces like “nature”. In this stage human beings explain the meaning of the world in terms of “essences”, “ideas”, etc.

Positive: Positive literally means anything in the affirmative. For Comte it is the last stage of the development of mind. Here the search for ‘original sources’ ‘final ends’ about existence of human beings stops. Instead human beings start observing phenomena and establishing regular links which exist between these phenomena. Thus, in the positive stage human beings search for social laws which link facts and which govern social life.

Theological: According to the dictionary, theology is the study of religion. For Comte it is the first stage of development of mind. In this stage mind explains phenomenon by ascribing them to beings or forces comparable to human beings. Here explanations take the form of myths concerning spirits and supernatural beings.

1.8 Study Guide

1. Allan, Kenneth. (2006). *The Social Lens: An Invitation to Social and Sociological Theory*. London: Sage.
2. Coser, Lewis. (1977). *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, (second edition) New York: Harcourt.
3. Turner, B.S. (Ed.) (2009). *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. Sussex: Blackwell.
4. Zeitlin, Irving M. (1969). *Ideology and Development of Sociological Theory*. New Jersey:
5. Prentice Hall Sociology Series.

Unit-02 Hierarchy of Sciences

Structure

- 2.1 Learning Objectives**
- 2.2 Introduction/ Assessment of Prior Knowledge**
- 2.3 Hierarchy of Sciences**
- 2.4 Summary**
- 2.5 Self Assessment Questions**
- 2.6 Key words**
- 2.7 Study Guide**

2.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- Grasp positive philosophy and evolution of different natural sciences
- Define and explain sociology and distinguish sociology's specific role
- Distinguish and compare between biology and sociology
- Explain unifying principles through which social stability is maintained in society.

2.2 Introduction/ Assessment of Prior Knowledge

You may have studied the sociological thinker August Comte in earlier units in details. He is associated with many theories and concepts which led to the development and shaping up sociology as a modern discipline of knowledge production. This unit will introduce you to the idea of 'positivist philosophy' as propounded by August Comte which led to emergence of idea of 'positivism' within sociology. We use positivism in everyday life when we put things backed by concrete facts which are expressed through numbers and logics. It can be a situation when we are debating about the rise of increased suicides, road accidents or criticizing the state policies for being ineffective by using the quantitative or statistical methods. Positivism is both an approach and perspective which has affected the way we see the world or interpret any event or phenomenon. One of the most important contributions of positivism is the development of science and scientific rationality. The science and scientific rationality gave human beings not only the technology and diverse products but also the mechanism to use them to change our lives. This unit will help you understand the idea of positivism, its history and contributions to the world.

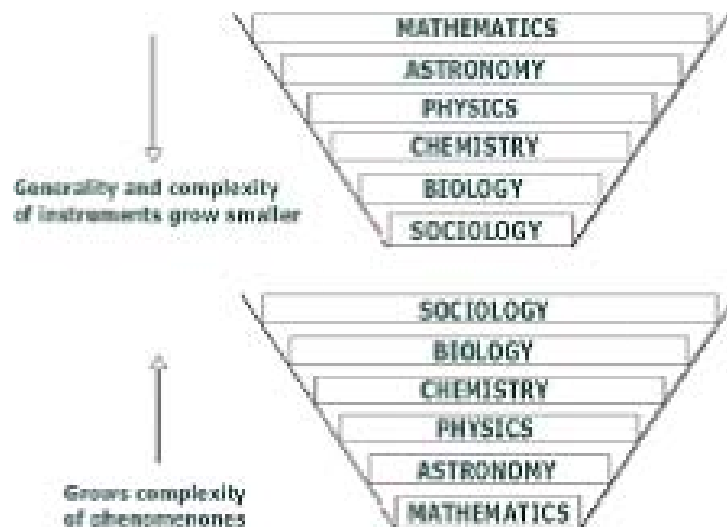
2.3 Hierarchy of Sciences

Comte's second best known theory, which is the theory of hierarchy of sciences, is intimately connected with the Law of Three Stages. Just as mankind passes through determinant stages, scientific knowledge also passes through similar stages of development. But different sciences progress at different rate. Any kind of knowledge reaches the positive stage early in proportion to its generality, simplicity, and independence of other departments. He put forth a hierarchical

arrangement of the sciences in a way which coincided with

1. The order of their historical emergence and development
2. The order of dependence upon each other (each rests on the one which precedes it, and prepares the way for the one that follows it)
3. Their decreasing degree of generality and the increasing degree of complexity of their subject matter, and
4. The increasing degree of modifiability of the facts which they study.

The serial order of sciences on the basis of their emergence and increasing complexity were Mathematics, Chemistry, Astronomy, Physics, Biology, and Sociology.



From the above classification it becomes clear that Mathematics, according to Comte, is the simplest science while Sociology is the most complex science. In Comte's view, Mathematics was the first science to reach positive stage, followed by Astronomy, Physics and Chemistry, and after these sciences had reached the positivistic stage, thought organic phenomena could become more positivistic. The first organic science to move from the metaphysical to the positive stage was biology, or physiology. This paved the way for Sociology which could move away from the metaphysical speculations of the 17th and 18th century towards a positivistic mode of thought. Sociology has been the last to emerge because it is the more complex and because it had to wait for the other basic sciences to reach the positive stage.

Sociology was the most complex social science because it had to study society, the most

complex matter. The other sciences concentrated on comparatively simpler subjects than society. Sociology thus emerged because human beings recognized a new set of objective facts concerning their society like social disorganization, development of slums, poverty etc. which they could not explain, but which they needed to explain in order to deal effectively with them. When Comte spoke of Sociology to crown the hierarchy of sciences, he had the general unifying nature of science in his mind. He did not claim that Sociology is superior to all other sciences. He only felt that with the growth of positive knowledge all sciences can be brought into relationship with each other. According to Comte, all science passes through the three stages, the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. But the individual sciences do not move through these three stages simultaneously. In fact, the higher a science stands in the hierarchy, the later it shifts from one stage to the other. With the growth of positive knowledge he also advocated the use of positive methods for Sociology.

2.4 Summary

Overall, then, sociology had two departments: a “statics,” dealing with laws of order (relative to what was deduced to be “normal” for each social stage) and a “dynamics,” dealing with laws of progress. Comte’s construction of different societies into a developmental series was evidently abstract, as was his aprioristic conception of society as a living organism. It is easy to dismiss his model, on both scores, as ideological. But it was not inconsistent with his notion of positivity. Sociology, for him, was a “fundamental” science, having for its object not a concrete entity, but the order prevailing in a general domain of reality. The aim was nomothetic (the establishment of laws) not ideographic (analysis of the singular and concrete). It also accorded with Comte’s insistence that inductivism without theory, including a concept of a science’s specific domain, was blind. Not just in method, but in substance, Comte’s sociology ascribed a prominent role to ideas. On its static side, ideational consensus was essential for social order. On its dynamic side, mental development was the active historical force. From the law of stages could be derived an account of social progress (Ritzer 2005).

2.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Describe the salient features of Comte’s hierarchy of sciences.
2. What is the order of hierarchy in science?

3. Who explain hierarchy of science?
4. What is the methodology developed by Comte?

2.6 Key words

Deconstruction: It is an approach which rigorously pursues the meaning of a text to the point of undoing the oppositions on which it is apparently founded, and to the point of showing that those foundations are irreducibly complex, unstable or impossible. The term was introduced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

Feminism: Feminism describes a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women.

Positive: Positive literally means anything in the affirmative. For Comte it is the last stage of the development of mind. Here the search for 'original sources' 'final ends' about existence of human beings stops. Instead human beings start observing phenomena and establishing regular links which exist between these phenomena. Thus, in the positive stage human beings search for social laws which link facts and which govern social life.

Science: Systematised knowledge derived from observation, study and experimentation. Scientific knowledge can be tested, verified or proved.

2.7 Study Guide

1. Adams, Bert N. and Sydie, R.A. (2001). Sociological Theory. California: Pine Forge Press.
2. Coser, Lewis.(1977). Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context, (second edition) New York : Harcourt.
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Unit-03 Theory of Positivism

Structure

3.1 learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

3.3 Theory of Positivism

3.3.1 Comte's view of Sociological Theory

3.3.2 Use of Sociological Methods

3.3.3 Comte's Organisation of Sociology

3.4 Summary

3.5 Self Assessment Questions

3.6 Key words

3.7 Study Guide

3.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- Historical and philosophical context of positivism
- The definitions and idea of positivism
- Positivism and development of sociology
- Critique of positivism and empirical method

3.2 Introduction/ Assessment of Prior Knowledge

You may have studied the sociological thinker August Comte in earlier units in details. He is associated with many theories and concepts which led to the development and shaping up sociology as a modern discipline of knowledge production. This unit will introduce you to the idea of ‘positivist philosophy’ as propounded by August Comte which led to emergence of idea of ‘positivism’ within sociology. We use positivism in everyday life when we put things backed by concrete facts which are expressed through numbers and logics. It can be a situation when we are debating about the rise of increased suicides, road accidents or criticizing the state policies for being ineffective by using the quantitative or statistical methods. Positivism is both an approach and perspective which has affected the way we see the world or interpret any event or phenomenon. One of the most important contributions of positivism is the development of science and scientific rationality. The science and scientific rationality gave human beings not only the technology and diverse products but also the mechanism to use them to change our lives. This unit will help you understand the idea of positivism, its history and contributions to the world.

3.3 Theory of Positivism

Positivism is a philosophy developed by Auguste Comte in the middle of the 19th century that stated that the only authentic knowledge is scientific knowledge, and that such knowledge can only come from positive affirmation of theories through strict scientific method. This view is sometimes referred to as a scientist ideology, and is often shared by technocrats who believe in the necessary progress through scientific progress. As an approach to the philosophy of science deriving from Enlightenment thinkers like Pierre-Simon Laplace (and many others), positivism

was first systematically theorized by Comte, who saw the scientific method as replacing metaphysics in the history of thought, and who observed the circular dependence of theory and observation in science. Comte was thus one of the leading thinkers of social evolutionism thought. Comte first described the epistemological perspective of positivism in “The Course in Positive Philosophy”, a series of texts published between 1830 and 1842. These texts were followed by his work, “A General View of Positivism” in 1948.

Positivism is also depicted as the view that all true knowledge is scientific and that all things are ultimately measurable. Because of its close association with reductionism, positivism and reductionism involve the view that entities of one kind are reducible to entities of another, such as societies to numbers, or mental events to chemical events. It also involves the contention that processes are reducible to physiological, physical or chemical events and even those social processes are reducible to relationships between actions of individuals or that biological organisms are reducible to physical systems.

3.3.1 Comte’s view of Sociological Theory

As a descendant of French Enlightenment, Comte was impressed with the Newtonian revolution. He argued, all phenomena are subject to invariable natural laws, and sociologists must use their observations to uncover the laws governing the social universe, in much the same way as Newton had formulated the law of gravity. Several points are important in this view of sociological theory. First, sociological theory is not to be concerned with causes per se but, rather, with the laws that describe the basic and fundamental relations of properties in the social world. Second, sociological theory must reject arguments by “final causes”- that is, analysis of the results of a particular phenomenon for the social whole. Thirdly, the goal of sociological activity is to reduce the number of theoretical principles by seeking only the most abstract and only those that pertain to understanding fundamental properties of the social world. Comte thus held a vision of sociological theory as based on the model of the natural sciences, particularly physics. It is for this reason, he preferred the term social physics to sociology.

The laws of social organization and change will be discovered, refined, and verified through a combination of theory and empirical observation. According to Comte, all theories must be based upon observed facts and it is equally true that facts cannot be observed without the guidance of some theory. Scientifically speaking, all isolated, empirical observation is idle, and

even radically uncertain; that science can use only those observations which are connected with some law.

For Comte, sociology's goal was to seek to develop abstract theoretical principles. Observations of the empirical world must be guided by such principles, and abstract principles must be tested against the empirical facts. Empirical observations that are conducted without this goal in mind are not useful in science. Theoretical explanations of empirical events thus involve seeing how they are connected in law like ways. Comte clearly intended that sociology must initially establish a firm theoretical foundation before making efforts to use the laws of sociology for social engineering.

Natural sciences are classified into two classes, the abstract or general and the concrete or particular. Abstract science deals with discovery of laws that regulates a particular phenomenon. The function of concrete natural sciences is the application of these laws to the actual history of existing beings. Therefore, our business concentrates around the abstract sciences which are fundamental in raising the scientific status of a subject.

Comte believed that Sociology should be modelled after the natural sciences. Sociology could seek and discover the fundamental properties and relations of the social universe and could explain them in abstract principles. Observation of empirical events could be used to generate, confirm and modify sociology's law. These laws could be used as tools or instruments to modify the social world.

3.3.2 Use of Sociological Methods

Comte formulated four methods for Sociology: (1) Observation, (2) Experimentation, (3) Comparison, and (4) Historical Analysis.

Observation-

For Comte, positivism was based on the use of senses to observe social facts. Comte maintained that the new science of society must rely on reasoning and observation rather than on the authority of tradition. Observation must be unbiased and always guided by a theory. This is necessary for the development of a science. He is credited for firmly establishing sociology as a science of social facts liberating social thought from the realm of morals and metaphysical speculations.

Experimentation-

Comte recognized that artificial experimentation is not possible with the society and the social phenomena. However, natural experimentation frequently takes place whenever the regular course of the phenomenon is interfered with in any determinate manner. Here he compares biology with sociology. As the biologist can learn about normal bodily functioning from the study of various diseases, so also the social physicists can learn the normal social processes by studying the pathological cases. Even though Comte's view of natural experimentation lacked the logic of the experimental method, it fascinated the later generation of sociologists.

Comparison-

Just as comparative analysis had been useful in biology, comparison of social forms with those of lower animals, with coexisting states, and with past systems could also generate considerable insight into the operation of the social universe. By comparing elements that are present and absent, and similar and dissimilar, knowledge about the fundamental properties of the social world can be achieved.

Historical Analysis-

Comte originally classified historical analysis as a variation of the comparative method, comparing present with the past. Historical method compares societies throughout the time in which they have evolved. But his formulation of "the law of three stages" emphasized that the laws of social dynamics could ultimately be developed only with careful observation of the historical movement of societies.

Comte believed these methods to be necessary for sociological analysis. Even though these methods fall much below the modern scientific standards, he was responsible to compel the later scholars to study social facts scientifically. He visualized social physics to be a theoretical science capable of formulating and testing the laws of social organization and change. His formulation of sociology's methods added increased credibility to this claim.

3.3.3 Comte's Organisation of Sociology

Comte saw sociology to be the extension of biology which studied organs in organisms. Therefore, sociology has to study social organization. It stressed on the fact that society is an "organic whole" whose component organs are interrelated and interdependent with each other. These parts could not be studied in isolation. As Comte emphasized, "there can be no scientific study of society, either in its conditions or its movements, if it is separated into portions and its

divisions are studied apart”.

The above theoretical approach gave birth to functionalism in the later years. Attempts were made to link sociological analysis to the biological sciences. Along with the study of social pathologies to understand the normal operation of the society, Comte viewed various structures as analogous to “elements, tissues, and organs” of biological organisms. However, this organismic analogizing is limited to dividing the social physics into statical and dynamical analysis.

Comte wanted to build Sociology based on the biological sciences. His vision of social order was congruent with that of the biological organism, where each organ is interdependent on each other and contributes for the maintenance of the entire body. An idea of order and progress is indispensable for Social Physics, as ideas of organization and life is inseparable from biology. Thus, he divides Sociology into (1) social statics (the study of social order) and (2) social dynamics (the study of social progress and change).

3.4 Summary

Sociology has come a long way in its development. It has tremendously shaped our perspective and approaches to see this world. The whole stream of social science knowledge and natural sciences owes much to the positivist philosophy as it led to phenomenal extension and expansion of knowledge about the world. This new knowledge was both revolutionary and resistive as it was purely based on evidence against the apriory notions, beliefs and practices. It came with certain normative concerns therefore It had both the ideology and agenda of restructuring and reorganizing the society on completely new visions. This modern knowledge across disciplines ranging from medical science to history, information technology to economics, sociology to robotics and so on owes their modern origination to positivism. The contribution of positivism is immense in the world whether it is the development of modern science, technology, trade and commerce, managing natural resources and human capital.

3.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Can there be value free sociology possible? Introspect and discuss with your friends.
2. Trace out the other thinkers who contributed to the idea of positivism.
3. Find out the influence of positivism in other school of thoughts?

4. What is post positivism? read literature about it.
5. What is social construction and how it is different from positivism? Discuss.

3.6 Key words

Universality-The universal concepts of sociology are those that form the basic foundation of the discipline found in all human societies and valid at all times, such as the concepts of sanction, the class, social stratification, social mobility, group, culture, values, religion, custom and many others.

Positivism- It is the name for the scientific study of the social world. Its goal is to formulate abstract and universal laws on the operative dynamics of the social universe. A law is a statement about relationships among forces in the universe.

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Block-02 Emile Durkheim

Unit-04 Division of Labour

Unit-05 Theory of Suicide

Unit-06 Social Facts

Unit-07 Theory of Religion

Unit-04 Division of Labour

Structure

- 4.1 Learning Objectives**
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4.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- Discuss division of labour as a social process which aims at maintaining social solidarity and how it contributes to collective consciousness
- Discuss the Division of Labour and Civilisation;
- Discuss about the Division of Labour and the ‘Happiness Hypothesis’

4.2 Introduction/assessment of Prior Knowledge

David Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist. He formally established the academic discipline and is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science. Durkheim was deeply preoccupied with the acceptance of sociology as a positive science. He refined the positivism originally set forth by Auguste Comte. For him, sociology was the science of institutions (beliefs and modes of behaviour instituted by the collectivity) and it aims to discover structural social facts. Durkheim was a major proponent of structural functionalism, a foundational perspective in both sociology and anthropology. In his view, sociology should study the society at large, rather than being limited to the specific action of individuals. He remained a dominant force in the French intellectual life until his death in 1917 and presenting numerous lectures and published a variety of works which includes the sociology of knowledge, morality, social stratification, religion, law, education, and deviance.

Chief among his claims is that society is a reality, *sui generis*, or a reality unique to itself and irreducible to its composing parts. It is created when individual consciences interact and fuse together to create a synthetic reality that is completely new and greater than the sum of its parts. This reality can only be understood in sociological terms, and cannot be reduced to biological or psychological explanations. The fact that social life has this quality would form the foundation of another of Durkheim’s claims, that human societies could be studied scientifically. For this purpose he developed a new methodology, which focuses on what Durkheim calls “social facts”, or elements of collective life that exist independently of and are able to exert an influence on the individual.

4.3 Early Life and Works

David Emile Durkheim was born in April 1858 in Epinal, located in the Lorraine region of France. His family was devoutly Jewish, and his father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all rabbis. Durkheim, however, broke with the tradition and went to the Ecole normale superieure in 1879, where he studied philosophy. He graduated in 1882 and began teaching the subject in France. In 1887 he was appointed to teach social sciences and pedagogy at the University of Bordeaux, allowing him to teach the first ever official course in France. Also in 1887, Durkheim married Louise Dreyfus and had two children. During his time at Bordeaux, Durkheim had great success, publishing his doctoral thesis on *The Division of Labour* (1893), *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) and *Suicide* (1897). Also, in 1896 he established the first sociological periodical *L'Annee sociologique*. By the time of his death in 1917 at the age of 59, he had produced a large body of scholarly work and founded one of the most coherent theoretical perspectives of the nineteenth century. He is best known for founding sociology as a discipline and for defining the boundaries of its subject matter.

During his lifetime, Durkheim was politically engaged, yet kept these engagements discrete. He defended Alfred Dreyfus during the Dreyfus affair and was a founding member of the Human Rights League. Durkheim was familiar with Karl Marx's ideas. Yet, Durkheim was very critical of Marx's work, which he saw as unscientific and dogmatic, as well as of Marxism, which he saw as needlessly conflictual, reactionary, and violent. Nonetheless, he supported a number of socialist reforms, and had a number of important socialist friends, but never committed himself to the party and did not make political issues a primary concern. Despite his muted political engagement, Durkheim was an ardent patriot of France. He hoped to use his sociology as a way to help a French society suffering under the strains of modernity, and during First World War he took up a position writing anti-German propaganda pamphlets, which in part use his sociological theories to help explain the fervent nationalism found in Germany.

4.4 Intellectual Influence

Durkheim was not the first thinker to attempt to make sociology a science. Auguste Comte, who wished to extend the scientific methods to the social sciences, and Herbert Spencer, who developed an evolutionary utilitarian approach that he applied to different areas in the sciences,

made notable attempts and their work had a formative influence on Durkheim. Durkheim appropriated elements of Comte's positivism as well as elements of his scientific approach to studying societies. Durkheim's analysis of the operation of different parts to the functioning of the social whole, and his use of organic analogy, was in many ways inspired by Spencer's functionalist analysis. However, Durkheim was critical of these attempts at Sociology and felt that neither had sufficiently divorced their analyses from metaphysical assumptions. These were to be particularly found in what Durkheim considered Comte and Spencer's unilinear model of social development, which were based on a priori laws of social evolution. Durkheim incorporated elements of evolutionary theory into his, but he did so in a critical way. The sociological method that Durkheim devised sought to be free of the metaphysical positivism of Comte and Spencer differed greatly from Comte's mere extension of the scientific method of the natural sciences to society.

Several other people also influenced Durkheim's theoretical orientation. Gabriel Monod and Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, both historians, introduced Durkheim to systematic empirical and comparative methods that could be applied to history and the social sciences. German scholars such as Alfred Wagner, Gustav Schmoller, Rudolph von Jhering, Albert Schaffle, and Wilhem Wundt laid the foundations for Durkheim's social realism and provided a powerful critique to utilitarian conceptions of morality, epitomized by Spencer, which viewed the origin of morality within the rational, self interested calculations of the individual. Kant, Plato, William James, and Descartes, among others are also present in Durkheim's work and influenced him in substantial ways.

4.5 Theory of Division of Labour

The Division of Labour in Society is a book written, originally in French (*De la division du travail social*), by Emile Durkheim in 1893. It was Durkheim's first major published work and the one in which he introduced the concept of anomie, or the breakdown of the influence of social norms on individuals within a society. In the book, he discusses how the division of labour is beneficial for the society because it increases the reproductive capacity, the skill of the workmen, and it creates a feeling of solidarity between the people. The division of labour goes beyond economic interests. It also establishes social and moral order within a society. The theme of this book is the relationship between individuals and society or the collectivity. It is indeed a

classic study of social solidarity. In this book he reacted against the view that modern industrial society could be based simply upon agreement between individuals motivated by self-interest and without any prior consensus. He agreed that the kind of consensus in modern society was different from that in the simpler social systems. But he saw both of these as two types of social solidarity. He has also tried to determine the social consequences of the division of labour in modern societies.

4.5.1 Meaning of division of labour

The concept of “division of labour” has been used in three ways:

1. In the sense of the technical division of labour, it describes the production process;
2. As the sexual division of labour, it describes the social divisions between men and women;
3. Durkheim’s social division of labour refers to differentiation in society as a whole.

In a general sense, the term division of labour involves the assignment to each unit or group a specific share of a common task. As used by the early classical economists, like Adam Smith, the term describes a specialisation in workshops and the factory system, and explains the advantages accruing in terms of the increased efficiency and productivity from these new arrangements.

4.5.2 Durkheim’s view of division of labour

The theory of division of labour had several key aims. Firstly, Durkheim wanted to make a distinction between ‘the social division of labour’ and ‘the economic division of labour’. Second, he wanted to study the social links that connects individuals with society and the social bonds which connect individuals to each other. Third, he wanted to examine the origin of the social links and bonds to see how they are related to the overall system of social cohesion in society, and the extent to which this cohesion was formed within the different social groups he studied. Fourth, he wanted to see how the system of social links change as the structure of society becomes more complex and subject to changes in the division of labour.

The term ‘the division of labour’ refers to the process of dividing labour among individuals in a group so that the varieties of economic and domestic tasks are performed by different people for collective maintenance of society. The process of division of labour begins as soon as individuals form themselves into groups. They cooperate collectively by dividing their labour and by

coordinating their economic and domestic activities for the purpose of survival. Durkheim believed that division of labour emerged out of collective choice. It is not the result of the private choices of individuals or the result of organic traits that emerged during the process of evolution. Durkheim makes a distinction between the ‘social division of labour’ and what Adam Smith called ‘the economic division of labour’. Smith describes the process of economic division of labour as the division of labour during the manufacturing in the production process which increases productivity. The process of dividing labour tends to accelerate the rate of production. However, the social division of labour, as used by Durkheim describes the social links and bonds that develop between the individuals of a society who enter into cooperation for carrying out joint economic and domestic tasks. Smith’s use of division of labour referred only to the process of dividing up labour to increase the rate of production. Whereas, Durkheim’s use of division of labour referred to the principle of social cohesion that develops in societies whose social links and bonds result from the way individuals relate to one another when their labour is divided along economic and domestic tasks. Durkheim observed that the social division of labour led to the formation of social links and bonds that attach individuals to the wider society and different individuals with each other. These links and bonds formed a system of attachments to society which Durkheim referred to as ‘social solidarity’.

4.5.3 Social solidarity and social cohesion

According to Durkheim, social solidarity refers to the system of social bonds which link individuals directly to the wider society. He also used the term solidarity to identify a system of social relations linking individuals to each other and to society as a whole. Without these social links, individuals would be separate and unrelated. Durkheim opines that social solidarity and cohesion describes the level of intensity that exists in the social attachments linking individuals to the collective structure of society. He thought that social cohesion acts as ‘social cement’ which creates attachments between individuals in a society and these attachments exercise an emotional hold over them by making their attachment more intense and cohesive. Social solidarity and social cohesion manifest themselves in two very broad and distinct ways and these two broad systems of social solidarity are ‘mechanical solidarity’ and ‘organic solidarity’.

4.5.4 Characteristics of mechanical solidarity

According to Durkheim, societies characterised by mechanical solidarity depict social cohesion based on common roots of identity and similarity. Here, an individual is linked directly to society through various points of attachment which bind the members together collectively. There is no distinction between individual conscience and collective conscience. Social rules and practices are religious in nature and encompass all aspects of social life and activity. Religion is the predominant social institution and religious ceremonies and periodic rites form the basis of their common social attachments. The division of labour is rudimentary. Individuals perform economic and domestic tasks for achievement of common social goal. Here the members are obliged towards each other. There is a common system of beliefs and practices rooted in religious life and this common system of beliefs bind them together. Because their system of beliefs is primarily religious in nature, the common conscience is rooted in religious law. As a result, offences against common beliefs and social practices are punished by repressive sanctions and physical punishment based on penal law. Individual differences are subordinated by group solidarity. There is no private life and no individual autonomy. The social cohesion of the group is intense and the links binding the individual to the social whole are strong and unified.

Durkheim pointed out that these societies are made up of groups called 'segments' consisting of many homogeneous clans who together form a 'tribe'. These people are confined to a territory, live in close proximity and are united together in a confederation of people, as the native tribes in North America. Segmental societies take their basic form from the family and political unit. These societies have a rudimentary economy based on hunting and gathering with some agriculture. This leads to a simple division of labour where tasks are performed collectively. There is no private property and the tools of maintenance are shared by everyone collectively. Social bonds exert an emotional hold over the individuals and these bonds link one individual with the other individuals and with the entire society. Of these attachments, family and religious institutions form the most intense relations. There are common customs and social rules which provide cohesion to the entire society. Their solidarity is mechanical because they share underlying beliefs and practices which unify them as a common people, and because they act in unison and have their personality defined by their religious personality. Their social links and bonds tie the individual directly to society without private life or other forms of social separation. Here, individuals are more dependent on society as a whole and the collective personality is

invested with unusually strong powers.

4.5.5 Characteristics of organic solidarity

In societies with organic solidarity, individuals are grouped according to the role they play in the occupational structure. As the people are divided on the basis of their occupation, they begin to lead their own lives different from others and this leads to private life and separation of the family and religious systems. Societies with organic solidarity have larger populations spread out over a broader geographical area. The economy is industrial in nature and a complex division of labour patterns the social activity. People perform separate and specialized occupational and economic functions, and work separately from each other rather cooperating collectively. Organic solidarity is characterized by an increase in the density of society due to the expansion of the population, the growth of cities and the development of means of transport and communication. The cooperation among the people is indirect and patterned through the division of labour which satisfies their economic needs by performing separate occupational tasks. The institutional structure extends beyond the family and tribe and economy replaces religion as the dominant form of social institution. Bonds of society created by religious solidarity begin to deteriorate. Separate institutional organs develop to cater to the individual needs of the people. In the social division of labour, individual is linked to the society through the specialized occupational roles they perform. It increases the mutual dependency of one individual over the other since they are unable to perform other occupational functions while performing their own. Their social cohesion thus takes place through the division of labour rather than directly through the immediate social cooperation.

As the density of population increases in these societies, personal bonds become weak and rare. Mutual obligation of one individual towards the other disappears. The social reliance between the individuals increases their dependency on each other since they are unable to produce products that others produce. Hence, their solidarity is 'organic'. Bonds of obligation are replaced by bonds of contract and contractual obligation. Restitutive sanctions emerge where judicial laws redress the social deviances. At this stage, individual has more autonomy and becomes the object of legal rights and freedoms. Autonomous social organs develop in which political, economic and legal functions become specialized. The collective conscience is less resistant to change and becomes weaker.

4.5.6 Collective conscience and the division of labour

According to Durkheim, collective conscience refers to a body of beliefs, practices and customary enactments which are held in common by all members of a society. These beliefs are diffused throughout the society, define social purposes, gives meaning to social actions and patterns social life. Collective conscience is analytically separable from collective conscience. It creates common conditions of existence, functions to connect successive generations to each other and acts to define individual relations to each other and to society in the form of binding social obligations and ties. Durkheim elaborates four different characteristics of collective conscience.

First, is the volume of collective conscience which refers to the pervasiveness of collective beliefs and the degree to which they extend throughout the entire society. It also denotes the intrusion of beliefs and practices into the lives and attitudes of the individuals. The greater is the volume of collective conscience, the greater is the individual's attachment to the prevailing collective beliefs.

Second, is the intensity of collective conscience. It refers to the extent to which the collective beliefs and practices exert an emotional claim on the individual. The more intense the collective belief, the greater is the similarity between the individuals and the more encompassing in the collective conscience.

Third is the characteristic of determinateness. This refers to the amount of resistance offered by collective beliefs and how willingly they accept change. The more uniform and well defined the collective beliefs, the greater is the consensus and greater is the resistance to change. When collective beliefs and practices lack determinateness, they become less resistant to change.

Fourth characteristic is the content. It refers to the dominant characteristics of the society and to its collective disposition. Thus there are two prevailing forms of content- first, religious content in which the primary form of collective beliefs and practices originate from religious law and exerts a hold over the individuals through religious rules and sacred rituals. Second is the secular content where religion is replaced by practical and economic necessities of life.

We can locate the level of collective conscience in the two forms of solidarity based on the above four characteristics:

1. The volume of collective conscience is high in mechanical solidarity and low in organic solidarity.

2. The intensity or the emotional hold of collective conscience over the individuals is higher in mechanical solidarity and lower in organic solidarity.
3. Societies based on mechanical solidarity are rigid and more resistant to change, whereas change comes much easily in societies based on organic solidarity.
4. The content of collective conscience is primarily religious in nature in mechanical solidarity. But in organic solidarity, the content of collective conscience is secular in nature. Here more stress is laid on individualism.

4.5.7 System of laws and social solidarity

Durkheim believed that there was a fundamental relationship between judicial rules and social solidarity. The legal rules and the system of punishment reflect the system of social solidarity and social cohesion. We will classify the different types of law in order to discover the different corresponding types of social solidarity.

4.5.7.1 Repressive sanctions and penal laws

Penal law imposes harm and suffering upon the offender. It does this in either of the two ways: first, by reducing the social honour of the offender and thus inflicting some form of loss or damage; second, by depriving the offender of either their freedom or their life. Penal law corresponds to societies whose solidarity is mechanical and whose social cohesion is intense. Punishment is severe bringing physical harm to the offender and applying sanctions against offenders which are 'repressive'. It is the essential function of the repressive sanctions to maintain social cohesion by setting examples by means of punishment which act to preserve and reinforce the collective rules and sacred beliefs and by repairing the damage done to the collective conscience as a whole as a sequel to the offence.

4.5.7.2 Restitutive sanctions and contract law

In contrast to the repressive sanctions and penal laws, the system of contract law arises only in industrial societies whose social cohesion is organic. Contract law refers to the system of modern law in advanced societies. Under this system of judicial rules, sanctions are restitutive rather than repressive. Industrial society leads to the development of various social institutions which

become increasingly specialized as they replace the institutions of the tribal segment. These social institutions begin to function through specialized agencies such as the courts, arbitration council, tribunals and administrative bodies. The authority of the legal rules is exercised through specific functionaries such as judges, magistrates and lawyers. Restitutive sanctions have the job of restoring things to the way they were before the offence took place. The intension is to undertake compensation and restore the damage created by the offense rather than to inflict suffering upon the offender. The job of contract law is to develop rules which bind individuals to each other by regulating contractual obligations. According to Durkheim, contractual laws do not arouse collective social sentiments and thus do not contribute directly to the overall cohesion of the society.

4.5.8 Causes of division of labour

According to Durkheim, there were three primary causes leading to the changes in the division of labour. First, with the increasing growth of population, people began to concentrate themselves in confined areas rather being spread over large territories. This led to the tightening of the social fabric as individuals came in close proximity with each other. Second is the growth of cities due to increasing social density. This created an intensification of interaction between individuals leading to an increase in the social mass. This tended to accelerate the mixing of segments into more consolidated social organs. Third was the increase in social volume. Improvement in the new means of transportation and communication led to new forms of social interchange. This reduced the gaps between the various segments of the society leading to an increase in moral density, intra-social relations and the frequency of contacts between individuals.

The stages in the division of labour are as follows: first, division of labour grows as survival becomes the basic need for the increasing population. Second, individuals living in close proximity feel that they must live cooperatively and here the cooperation takes the form of division of labour because it is the most efficient means of material survival for the individuals. Third, division of labour leads to specialization of occupations in which the labour is separated or specialized to meet the various material needs. Fourth, a system of mutual dependence is developed by the division of labour which is expressed in the form of rights, contracts, laws and social rules that forms an overall normative order. At this stage the struggle for existence becomes acute. Fifth, the material relations give birth to a system of social links which make up

the new system of social cohesion based on the functional division of labour.

As the division of labour develops, major social functions in society are broken down into smaller segments with specialized functions. Individuals are functionally interconnected through the division of labour since they are dependent upon others to produce what they cannot produce on their own. This mutual dependence is the key to the new system of social cohesion, since individuals are more dependent upon society while at the same time being more autonomous. The division of labour compels the individual to form new social bonds based on their occupational interconnectedness. These new social links produce spheres of competence and work whose allocation is no longer determined by custom.

4.5.9 Abnormal forms of division of labour

At the end of ‘The Division of Labour in Society’, however, Durkheim does note that there can be problems in the society. There are two abnormal forms of the division of labour, and the division of labour itself does not always function as well as it could in modern society.

4.5.9.1 Anomic division of labour

Anomic division of labour arises during an economic crisis when there is widespread commercial failure. This crisis undermines the social cohesion existing between specialized functions and creates a decline in overall social solidarity. Industrial and commercial crises constitute examples of the anomic division of labour. There is an increasing intervention of different interest groups who attempts to reconcile the different interests between capital and labour. Consequently, the social cohesion previously existing in social groups is no longer mediated by traditional social processes, rather by individuals whose private interests are channelled for purposes of protecting their specialized roles. Social groups previously mediated by links of social cohesion grow rigid and social solidarity is jeopardized. Private interest shadows the existence of a common authority. As a result, the social institutions grow opaque and lose their ability to maintain social linkage between individuals and groups.

4.5.9.2 Forced division of labour

Forced division of labour focuses on structural inequalities. Because of the different social

classes, people who are in a lower class will not receive the same type of opportunities. Because of inheritance, people who are undeserving of wealth will receive all the advantages that people who are deserving won't. The division of labour no longer meets the social needs of cohesion, but rather serves the specialized interests of certain social groups. It undermines social attachments between individuals and between individuals and social institutions. It creates conflict not only by imposing social inequalities, but by creating irregular and unjust forms of exchange. When the division of labour is forced, restraint does not come from a centralized authority and social cohesion diminishes.

4.6 Summary

Durkheim's general thesis in *The Division of Labour* operates with the commonplace distinction (that sledge-hammer of the evolutionists) between 'traditional' and 'modern' society. The diversity and complexity of human civilization is supposedly encompassed by this simple distinction, which stresses an evolution away from the mechanical solidarity characterizing primitive societies, to the sophisticated organic solidarity which provides the basis for a new harmonious integration within industrial society.

For Emile Durkheim, the social world is, above all, a moral world, and social reality is a moral reality. Throughout his life Durkheim was passionately engaged in the moral issues of his time; he saw it as his life task to contribute to the moral regeneration of the French nation to which he was so deeply attached. According to him, a social scientist can claim the mandate to intervene in the affairs of society only when his/her scientific investigation had brought results that warranted public trust. However, he made a numerous proposals for reforms, for instance, he has drawn attention to the evil results of extreme differentiation and the extreme state of the DoL creates the following predicaments:

1. Extreme individualism
2. Lack of collective spirit and the feeling of interdependence
3. Normlessness

Durkheim held that it was not the DoL as such, but only the forced division that undermined social solidarity; this DoL was "pathological" because it was controlled by outmoded institutions, particularly private property. At the same time, however, Durkheim also held that social solidarity was impaired by the lack of a bunch of moral beliefs adequate to integrate the

new specializations – in short, by industrial anomie. Durkheim saw man as Homo duplex – as body, desire, and appetite and also as socialized personality. But man was specifically human only in the latter capacity, and he became fully human only in and through society.

4.7 Self Assessment Questions

1. Define the concept of division of labour.
2. What advantages Durkheim derive by distinguishing between mechanical and organic societies?
3. Explain the forms of division of labour.
4. How Durkheim differed from Marx in his study of the division of labour.

4.8 Key Words

Division of Labour: The splitting of a task into number of separate parts.

Repressive Law- Law that punishes the wrong doer to re-establish the power and authority of the group or the collectivity. The most prevalent type of law in primitive societies.

Restitutive Law- Law for restitution or reform. Its function is not to expiate but rather to restore to the rightful person what he or she has lost.

4.9 Study Guide

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Unit-05 Theory of Suicide

Structure

- 5.1 Learning Objectives**
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 - 5.3.2.1 Egoistic suicide**
 - 5.3.2.2 Altruistic suicide**
 - 5.3.2.3 Anomic suicid**
 - 5.3.2.4 Fatalistic suicide**
- 5.4 Summary**
- 5.5 Self Assessment Questions**
- 5.6 Key Words**
- 5.7 Study Guide**

5.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain suicide as a sociological concept
- analyze Durkheim's theory of suicide
- examine critically the types of suicide, outlined by Durkheim

5.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

Society is ultimately constructed out of patterns of behaviour (in Durkheim's view), then norms and values are the ultimate basis of social life. Although related to other aspects of society, its culture remains the key dynamic force shaping individuals and governing their behaviour. Unlike Marx, Durkheim certainly does not regard culture and religion as mere ideologies justifying economic arrangements. Rather both culture and religion do shape human behaviour. Ever since antiquity, one of the behaviours i.e. suicide, to which human beings responded with moral condemnation. From the story of the philosopher, Socrates, we know this is a supremely useless response. Socrates condemned suicide, asserting that "man, who is one of god's possessions, should not kill himself". Yet, he committed suicide himself, drinking poison after being sentenced to death by the state. He rationalized his choice thus: "suicide was legitimate when "god sends some compulsion upon him, as he sends compulsion on us at present". That compulsion Socrates felt wasn't either god-sent or divine.

5.3 Theory of Suicide

Durkheim first began to study the problem of suicide in the year 1888 while he was working on an article related to suicide and birth rate. In 1897, he published his book entitled "Suicide" and this was his third major social work, after "The theory of division of labour" and "The rules of sociological method". There were several reasons for which Durkheim was interested to work on this theme. First, suicide was a growing social problem in the then European society and industrialisation was seen as the major cause responsible for it, as it promoted individualism, social fragmentation, and weakening of social bonds among the individuals. Second, in the growing industrial society economic institutions dominated over the social institutions. Individual self interest and economic gain was given priority over collective interests which

reduced the level of social constraint. Third, the political crisis in French society created due to the Dreyfus affair in 1894 made Durkheim believe that social dissolution in industrial society could be understood sociologically by studying the bonds that links individual with the outside society. Fourth, factual evidence linked suicide to social factors like industrial change, occupation, family life and religion rather than on complex psychological factors.

5.3.1 A Social Theory of Suicide

The main purpose of Durkheim's attempt to study suicide was search for the social factors responsible for suicide rather than looking at the psychological states of individuals who take their own lives. Before Durkheim began his study on suicide, it was largely treated as a nervous disorder and its causes were believed to derive from the psychological states of individuals. Many believed that suicide was the result of mental illness, depression, sudden tragedy, reversal of fortune, personal setbacks or bankruptcy. Durkheim shifted his focus from individual motives and psychological states to social causes. Durkheim began to look for causes of suicide within the social framework of society. He tried to focus on the social attachments that exist between the individuals and the wider society and how these attachments link the individuals to basically three distinct groups outside themselves: the religious group, the family group and the political group. The central thesis of Durkheim's study was that people take their own lives not because of the psychological states of depression or mental illness but because of the social forces acting on them which reduce their attachments to the wider society to the point that become isolated, separate and autonomous from others. According to Durkheim, in industrial society private ego, excessive preoccupation with the self and excessive self reflection compels the individuals to commit suicide. Durkheim also rejected the theory of imitation by Gabriel Tarde who argued that suicide was the result of a type of psychological contagion and that suicide proliferated in a medium he referred to as psychological imitation.

Durkheim arrived at the concept of the social suicide rate after a careful examination of the mortality data which was obtained from public records of France, Germany, England, Denmark and Austria. It contained information about cause of death, age, marital background, religion and the total number of deaths by suicide of the country from which they were gathered. The term 'social suicide rate' refers to the number of suicidal deaths in a given society and the extent to which the suicide rates themselves could be looked upon as establishing a pattern of suicide for a

given society. By then, it was a common belief that suicide is an act performed by an individual driven by psychological causes. However, Durkheim took a completely different approach. He concentrated his study on the social factors that drives the individual to commit suicide and wanted to find out whether all the individual cases of suicide could be studied collectively. The data collected by Durkheim related to suicide rates hinted upon the social factors like marital status, religion, occupation and military service.

5.3.2 Types of Suicide

Durkheim's theory of suicide is divided into two explanatory parts. In the first part, Durkheim explains suicide by drawing on the concept of social integration or the bond that exists between the individual and society. In this case, egoistic and altruistic suicide forms opposite poles of social integration. In the second part, Durkheim explained suicide drawing on the concept of social regulation which refers to the restraints imposed by the society on individual wants and desires. Anomic and fatalistic suicide form opposite poles in relation to the changes in the regulatory functions of the society.

5.3.2.1 Egoistic suicide

The concept of 'egoism' developed in the nineteenth century industrial society which refers to the breakdown of social ties and pursuance of private interests. The individual is detached from the society and retreats into himself. It is characterised by excessive self-reflection on personal matters and withdrawal from the outside world. According to Durkheim, egoism occurs when the social bonds binding the individuals are slackened and are not sufficiently integrated at the points where the individual is in contact with the wider society. Egoism thus results from too much individualism and the weakening of the social fabric. Here, the individual ends become more important than the collective end of the society and the individual's personality dominates over the collective personality. The individual ego overshadows the social ego and becomes a threat to the social equilibrium.

Durkheim here asserts that religion, the major institution promoting social integration, gradually loses its importance. The primary function of religion is to promote integration of individuals with the different spheres of life by placing restrictions on the individual autonomy and self

reflection. Taking religious integration into account, the first thing that Durkheim observed was that Protestant countries had higher number of suicidal deaths than Roman Catholic countries. Even though both the religions condemn suicide with equal intensity, Protestants kill themselves more frequently than the Catholics. Durkheim reasoned that the most significant difference between Protestantism and Catholicism was the structure of their religious doctrine and teaching. Catholics accept their doctrine without question and criticism. But the Protestants encourage change and innovation at all levels of religious life and adopt a critical attitude towards formal doctrine. The result is a breakdown of the social mechanism attaching individuals to the religious group and encourages social and religious withdrawal. Individuals withdraw from religious society and reject the demands that religious beliefs impose upon their lives. This undermines religious integration and leads to religious individualism and a higher rate of suicide among Protestants in contrast to Catholics.

The second point of attachment between the individual and society is the family group or the domestic environment. Durkheim began by looking at the commonly held view about marriage and suicide. It was a common notion that as the burdens and responsibilities in a marriage increase, the risk of suicide also increases among the marital partners. But Durkheim said these views were false. Suicide rates show that unmarried persons commit suicide more frequently than the married people because conjugal relations contribute to social integration and link the individual to the group as a whole. The suicide rate is even lower for families with children. Further, the larger the family, the greater the sentiments and historical memories and therefore greater the social cohesion. This is reflected in the lower suicide rates for larger families. Smaller families, by contrast, develop fewer sentiments and fewer collective memories which lead to social cohesion and thus their shared experiences are not so intense. In the family, individuals have responsibilities and obligations lying outside themselves which reduces the inclination towards self and retreat to the private ego. These responsibilities and obligations act as the greater immunity to suicide.

The third point of attachment between the individual and society is the political or national group. The attachments to political society refer to the loyalty an individual has to their country or nation. By then it was a common view that political upheaval and social crisis increase the number of suicides. But, Durkheim contradicted this view. During revolution in France and political crisis in 1848, suicide cases actually declined. In Bavaria and Prussia the suicide rate

declined during the crisis of 1849. Durkheim argued that several social disruptions brought about by a political crisis actually increased the intensity of collective sentiments and stimulates patriotism and therefore increased social attachments. Political crisis creates a sense of nationalism among the individuals and forces them to think more of the common causes. This increases the social attachments among the individuals and the group and causes a greater integration in the society. It places moral demands on individuals and increases their patriotic spirit. When there is an absence of this patriotism and individuals cannot attach themselves with the larger political group, suicide rates tend to increase with the increase in political turmoil.

Simply stated egoistic suicide results from the absence of social integration and weakening of social bonds. Individuals retreat to themselves and withdraw from collective life. Individual ego prevails over the social ego. Durkheim believed that the chance of individual committing egoistic suicide becomes less if their link with the family, religion and the political group is strong enough to provide the required emotional support. The weaker these bonds, the more they depend on themselves and get preoccupied with personal and private matters. Durkheim believed, egoistic suicide is a common feature of industrial society because the bonds connecting the individuals and the social institutions are slackened and grow weak.

5.3.2.2 Altruistic suicide

Altruistic suicide results from too much integration. Durkheim, while studying the tribal societies, observed that the social customs in these societies placed a high degree of social honour on individuals who take their own lives in the name of social purposes greater than themselves. People take their lives not because of their personal choice or right but as a 'social duty' imposed upon them by the society. The individual ego is overwhelmed by the social ego and individualism gets less chance to express itself. Altruistic suicide is, therefore, at the polar opposite of social integration in relation to egoistic suicide.

Durkheim maintained that altruistic suicide is expressed in three distinct forms: (1) obligatory altruistic suicide, (2) optional altruistic suicide, and (3) acute altruistic or mystical suicide.

Obligatory suicide is a form of altruistic suicide where individuals take their own lives because the social customs and religious sanctions. Examples of obligatory suicide are found in India where there is the prevalence of the 'sati pratha'. It involves the practice of a voluntary self immolation where the widow burns herself on the funeral pyre of the dead husband. In this type

of altruistic suicide, the ‘obligation’ is imposed externally by religious society rather than by personal choice or private will.

Optional altruistic suicide is a form of suicide where individuals consider taking their own lives as a social duty. The society attaches honour to the renunciation of life and the dignity of the group is considered more important than the individual’s life.

Acute altruistic suicide is the most extreme form of altruistic self-destruction. In this case, the individual’s attachment to the group is so great that the individual renounces life for the actual felt ‘joy of sacrifice’. Examples of this can be found in Hindu society where suicide takes the form of religious hysteria and is looked upon with enthusiasm and great excitement. Individuals believe that their true self can only be realised when they will renounce themselves for the social good. Altruistic suicide occurs because of an excess of social integration and attachment that develops within the confines of the group. Individualism hardly develops since the purposes of the group are valued over individual existence. Under these circumstances acute altruistic suicide is the clearest case of suicide imposed by social ends and is thus a form of suicide induced by society. Examples of acute altruistic suicide can be found in the case of the suicide bombings that occurred during the terrorist attacks in the United States on 9/11. These types of suicide also include cases of military suicides.

5.3.2.3 Anomic suicid

According to Durkheim, ‘anomie’ refers to the decline that takes place in the regulatory functions of the society and social institutions during industrial development because of the weakening of the social control mechanisms. The regulatory function of society imposes restraints and sets limit on individual needs and wants for wealth, power and prestige. Historically, social regulation was performed by society through specific social institutions, which operated to set social and moral restraints on individual appetites by linking social wants to the available means for attaining these wants and by imposing limitations based on moral and religious guidelines. These social restraints gradually weakened with the development of the industrial society.

Durkheim’s discussion of anomic suicide begins by looking at the suicide rate of industrial society during periods of economic crisis created by financial recession and periods of economic decline. He observed that there was a rapid increase in the suicide rate during the European

crisis. As the crisis disappeared, suicide rates declined. However, according to Durkheim argued that the rise in the rates cannot be directly linked to economic disaster. He asserts that suicide rates increases not only with economic depression but also with economic prosperity. In fact, he believed that whenever an abrupt shift in social stability occurs, it alters the mechanism which places restraint on individual desires and social wants. Durkheim stressed the importance of the regulatory mechanisms of society, and believed that a system of social regulation serves to set limits on individual desires by placing restraints on social wants and by serving the important purpose of balancing individual wants with the means for obtaining these wants. In a state of anomie, the regulatory limits usually imposed by society are absent and limits are not well defined. It leads to disappointment among the individuals who finally commit suicide. In traditional societies, religion is the primary means of social control that sets limit to individual wants and desires. With the development of society towards industrialisation, religion loses its importance and economy assumes a pivotal role. When the primary goal in life is to obtain material satisfaction through economic want and desires, there is an increased risk and a greater possibility for social crisis, especially at the level of the economy. Thus, it is the economically related functions, according to Durkheim, which create the largest category of suicide in contrast to other spheres of society in which the 'old regulatory forces' still prevail in practice more than does the new commercial spirit.

5.3.2.4 Fatalistic suicide

Fatalism signifies a form of suicide which occurs because of an excess of social regulation. It occurs because of an overly developed system of control over the individual. Fatalistic suicide was prevalent in slave society.

5.4 Summary

For Durkheim, social diversity led to unity; the conflicts that attend diversity were for him transitional phenomena. However, while Durkheim saw positive social functions served by such deviant behaviour as crime and suicide, his overriding concern was with stability as an absence of conflict. He nevertheless served to divorce the idea of diversity from conflict and to increase its respectability. During the ensuing century since Suicide (Durkheim, 1897, 1951) was

published it has been pointed to as a model of research informed by a compelling theoretical model, and, as such, has been as playing a singularly important role in establishing sociology as a science. At the same time, as noted previously, critics have taken aim at the book, questioning or criticizing its use and interpretation of data and raising concerns about its conceptual adequacy (Douglas, 1967; Pope, 1976; Jones, 1986; Besnard, 1993; Lehmann, 1995). These matters need not concern us here. Instead, we are interested in understanding Durkheim's contribution to the discussion of the role of individualism in the modern world and the attendant vicissitudes of community. What is apparent in this study is that the two types of suicide he identified are reflective of the modern condition: egoistic and anomic. Both arise due to an excess of individualism. Because it was Durkheim's intention in this work to highlight the social dangers of individualism, it might be suggested that he, like Ferdinand Tönnies and Alexis de Tocqueville, had a negative assessment of individualism, seeing it undermining community ties. Such a view, however, would constitute a serious misreading of Durkheim because although he saw some of the problems engendered by modern individualism, he also saw its positive side. He was definitely not a reactionary or conservative intellectual intent on returning to the dead and gone, when the individual had not fully emerged from the group. Although he was concerned about conditions that prompted the weakening of emotional ties between people, alienation, and the erosion of a sense of the common good. He also was convinced that (a) individualism was a constituent part of modern society and (b) individualism could, when properly channeled, serve to enhance organic solidarity (Giddens, 1971; Mestrovic, 1988: 134-40).

Durkheim discussed the impact of differentiation among people brought about by industrial society. One finds the concept of social solidarity and collective consciousness at the centre of Durkheim's thought. Social solidarity is connected with the division of labour, and suicide. The explanations of variations in suicide rates clearly embody the concern for the social cohesion of the collectivity. If egoistic suicide derives from insufficient social integration, altruistic suicide is the eventual outcome of an excess of it; moral regulation, in contrast, can only be too low producing anomic suicide, for the 'fatalistic' form of suicide has only a shadowy existence. Therefore the two dimensions of the social group that matter are social integration and moral regulation, and the element in society that most strongly influences is the moral order—above all as embodied in religion. Humans are more Civilized to the extent that they can deliberately construct their own moral order and then live by it.

5.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Explain suicide is a social fact.
2. Distinguish between egoistic and altruistic suicide with suitable examples.
3. Distinguish between anomic and fatalistic suicide with suitable examples.
4. Critically examine Durkheim's study of suicide and its relevance in contemporary society.

5.6 Key Words

Altruism: A behaviour which takes into account of the interests of others usually treated as in opposition to egoism, selfishness, and individualism.

Anomie: It is a condition of lawlessness, normlessness, or rulelessness.

Egoism: A behaviour emphasizing the importance of the individual and the individual's interests.

Fatalism: A system of beliefs which holds that everything has its fixed outcome, which cannot be avoided by effort or foreknowledge, and must be accepted as an unavoidable fact of life.

Suicide: it refers to the intentional killing of oneself. Intentions are, however, hard to identify.

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Unit-06 Social Facts

Structure

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

6.3 Social Facts

6.3.1 Meaning of Social Facts

6.3.2 Types of Social Facts

6.3.3 Characteristics of Social Facts

6.3.4 Externality and constraint

6.3.5 Rules for the observation of social facts

6.3.6 Rules for distinguishing the normal and pathological

6.3.7 Rules for the explanation of social facts

6.4 Summary

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6.7 Study Guide

6.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- Find the sociological ideas of Emile Durkheim
- Understand the concept of social fact
- Analyze critically the characteristics of social facts

6.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

The life and work of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) mark the acceptance of sociology as an academic discipline. In his proselytizing writings and through the exceptional gifts as a teacher, Durkheim won recognition for the idea of science of society which could contribute to the solution of the moral and intellectual problems of modern society. He sought to make this division a reality in major studies of the nature of social solidarity (*The Division of Labour*, 1893), the social causes of suicide (*Suicide*, 1897), and the function of primitive religion (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912). Although these titles would seem to suggest a person with far-ranging and diffuse interests, in fact Durkheim's entire intellectual career amounts to a remarkably coherent and persistent attempt to accomplish two intertwined goals. First, he wanted to establish sociology as a rigorous science of society, one that staked out its independence from other sciences, such as psychology, by defining the realm of "social facts" as the appropriate and legitimate subject matter of the discipline. Second, he was intent on employing this science in explicating the new bases for social solidarity made necessary by industrialization, thereby playing a vital role in rearticulating the moral bases of the new social order. Given these goals, it is fair to conclude that he was at once a sociologist and a moralist (Jones, 1986; Turner, 1993; Mestrovic, 1988), an idealist (Harris, 1968: 464), a functionalist (Turner, 1978: 25-28), a founder of multivariate analysis, an advocate of causal modeling (Giddens, 1971, 1972). Thus, he represents a social theorist who articulated some basic laws of the social universe. Durkheim's work remains of considerable intellectual significance as a powerful empirically based exemplification of organic functionalist theories of society.

His eventual success may be gauged from the fact that despite the considerable controversy that his ideas provoked, a professorship of social science was created for him in 1887 at the University of Bordeaux, where he taught for many years before going to the Sorbonne in Paris as

Professor of Sociology. He established France's first sociological journal *L'Année sociologique* and attracted a brilliant cadre of students to pursue studies in sociology (Lukes, 1972; Tiryakian, 1978). Although often insecure about his status and always fearful of the possibility of failure Durkheim became such a powerful presence at the Sorbonne that his critics, complaining about his power, frequently castigated him as playing the role of a "secular pope" (Lukes, 1972: 375).

6.3 Social Facts

In sociology, social facts are the values, cultural norms, and social structures which transcend the individual and are capable of exercising a social constraint. For Durkheim, sociology is nothing but the study of social facts and social facts must be considered as things. The task of the sociologist is to search for correlations between social facts in order to reveal laws of social structure. Having discovered these, the sociologist can then determine whether a given society is 'healthy' or 'pathological' and prescribe appropriate remedies. Within social facts, Durkheim distinguishes between material social facts and non material social facts. Material social facts deals with the physical social structure which influence the individual and non material social facts are the values, norms and conceptually held beliefs.

6.3.1 Meaning of Social Facts

Durkheim introduced the term 'social fact' in his phenomenal work "The Rules of Sociological Method". He defines social facts as "ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual and endowed with power of coercion by reason of which they control him". To Durkheim, society is a reality 'sui generis'. Society comes into being by the association of individuals. Hence society represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. This unique reality of society is distinct from the other realities studied by the physical or biological sciences. Social reality has an independent existence of its own, which is over and above the individual. Therefore, the reality of society must be the subject matter of sociology.

Social fact is that way of acting, thinking or feeling which is more or less general in given society. Durkheim treated social facts as things. They are real and exist independent of the individual's wills and desires. They are external to individual and are capable of exerting constraint upon them. In other words, they are coercive in nature. Social facts exist in their own

right and are independent of individual manifestations. The true nature of social facts lies in the collective or associational characteristics inherent in society. Legal codes and customs, moral rules, religious beliefs and practices, language etc. are all social facts.

6.3.2 Types of Social Facts

1. Structural or Morphological social facts- they make up the substratum of the collective life. These are the facts relating to the overall density and the size of the population of society and the complexity of its social and institutional structure. In these category of social facts are included the distribution of population over the surface of the territory, the forms of dwellings, nature of communication system etc.
2. Institutionalised social facts- they are more or less general and widely spread throughout the society. They represent the collective nature of society as a whole. Under this category fall the legal and moral rules, religious dogma and established beliefs and practices prevalent in a society.
3. Non-institutionalised social facts- these social facts have not yet been crystallised by the society and fall beyond the institutionalised norms of the society. These facts do not have an independent existence and their externality to and ascendancy over the individuals is yet not complete. For example, sporadic currents of opinion generated in a specific situation, enthusiasm generated in a crowd etc.

All these above mentioned social facts form a continuum and constitute social milieu of society. Durkheim also makes a distinction between normal and pathological social facts. A social fact is normal when it is generally encountered in a society of a certain type at certain phase of its evolution. Every deviation from this standard is a pathological social fact. According to Durkheim, for example, crime is a normal social fact. However, an extraordinary increase in the rate of crime is pathological.

6.3.3 Characteristics of Social Facts

The main characteristics of social facts are- externality, constraint, independence and generality. Social facts exist outside individual conscience. Their existence is external to the individuals. For example, civic or customary obligations are defined externally to the individual in laws and customs. Religious beliefs and practices exist outside and prior to the individual. Social facts are

already given in a society and remain in existence irrespective of the birth and death of an individual. For example, language continues to function independently of any single individual. Social facts exercise a constraint over the individual. Social facts are recognized because it forces itself over the individual. For example, the institutions of law, education, beliefs etc. are commanding and obligatory for all. The social facts are endowed with a power of coercion by reason of which they exert control.

Social facts are general throughout the society and diffused within the group. It is independent of the personal features of individuals and individual attributes of human nature. Examples are the beliefs, feelings and practices of the group taken collectively.

In sum, the social fact is specific. It is born of the association of individuals. It represents a collective content of social group or society. It differs in kind from what occurs in individual consciousness. Social facts can be subjected to categorisation and classification.

6.3.4 Externality and constraint

1. Every individual is born into an ongoing society, which has a definite structure or organisation. There are norms, values and belief in the society which exists before the birth of the individual and these are internalised by the individual through the process of socialisation. Since these social facts exist prior to the individual and have an objective reality, they are external to the individual.
2. Social facts are external to the individual in the sense that any one individual is only a single element within the totality of relationships, which constitutes a society.

Durkheim argued that social facts are distinct from individual or psychological facts. Social facts exercise a moral constraint over the individual. When the individual attempts to resist social facts they assert themselves. The assertion may range from a mild ridicule to social isolation and moral and legal sanctions.

Durkheim adds that social facts cannot be defined merely by their universality. Thus a thought or movement repeated by individuals is not thereby a social fact. What are important are the collective aspects of the beliefs, tendencies and practices of a group that characterise truly social phenomena. These social phenomena are transmitted through the collective means of socialisation.

6.3.5 Rules for the observation of social facts

According to Durkheim, social facts must be considered as things. Social facts are real. Social facts have to be studied by the empirical method and not direct intuition; and also, they cannot be modified by a simple effort of the will. While studying social facts as ‘things’ the following three rules have to be followed in order to be objective.

1. All preconceptions must be eradicated. Sociologists must emancipate themselves from the common place ideas that dominate the mind of the layperson and adopt an emotionally neutral attitude towards what they set out to investigate.
2. Sociologists have to formulate the concepts precisely. At the outset of the research the sociologists are likely to have very little knowledge of the phenomenon in question. They must study those properties that are external enough to be observed. For example, in Division of Labour the type of solidarity in a society can be perceived by looking at the type of law- repressive or restitutive, criminal or civil- which is dominant in the society.
3. When sociologists undertake the investigation of some form of social facts, they must study it from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations. The objectivity of social facts depends on their being separated from individual facts. Social facts provide a common standard for members of the society. Social facts exist in the form of legal rules, moral regulations, proverbs, social conventions etc. It is these that sociologists must study to gain an understanding of social life.

6.3.6 Rules for distinguishing the normal and pathological

Durkheim explains that the social fact is considered to be normal when it is understood in the context of the society in which it exists. A social fact is ‘normal’ for a given society when it has its utility for that societal type. Durkheim illustrates the example of crime. Durkheim argues that even though crime involves the deviation of individual behaviour from the approved set of social behaviours, it cannot be considered abnormal. First, crime as a social fact exists in all type of societies. Second, if there would be no deviation, there will be no change in the human behaviour and no modification of the existing social norms. To show that crime is normal Durkheim cites the example of Socrates, who according to the Athenian law was a criminal, his crime being the

independence of his thought. His crime rendered a service to his country because it served to prepare a new morality and faith, which the Athenians needed.

Durkheim applied the method used by the study of medicine to study social facts. He considered crime and punishment to be normal. When the rate of crime exceeds what is more or less constant for a given social type, then it becomes an abnormal or pathological social fact. Similarly, suicide is a normal social fact. But the sudden rise in the suicide rate in the Western Europe during the 19th century was a cause for concern for Durkheim and one of the reasons why he decided to study this phenomenon.

6.3.7 Rules for the explanation of social facts

There are two approaches used for the explanation of social facts- the causal and the functional.

1. Why- It explains why the social phenomenon in question exists. The causes, which give rise to a given social fact, must be identified separately from whatever social functions it may fulfil. Knowledge of the causes, which bring a phenomenon into being, can under certain circumstances allow us to drive some insight into its possible functions.
2. How- Durkheim's next concern is to determine the method by which they may be developed. The nature of social facts determines the method of explaining these facts. Since the subject matter of sociology has a social character, it is collective in nature, the explanation should also have a social character. According to Durkheim, explanation of social facts in terms directly in terms of individual characteristics or in terms of psychology would make the explanation false. Therefore in the case of causal explanation "the determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of the individual consciousness". In the case of functional explanation "the function of a social fact ought always to be sought in its relation to some social end".

The final point about Durkheim's logic of explanation is his stress upon the comparative nature of social science. To show that a given fact is the cause of another "we have to compare cases in which they are simultaneously present or absent, to see if the variations they present in these different combinations of circumstances indicate that one depends on the other". The comparative method is the very framework of the science of society for Durkheim.

6.4 Summary

Durkheim is one of the major contributors to the early development sociology and cultural anthropology, and his work still influences contemporary sociologists. One reason for Durkheim's continuing influence is that he claimed to establish sociology as the scientific study of a specific object of study, namely 'society'. 'Society' was, for Durkheim, a reality, sui generis, irreducible to any other sphere, such as that of biology, or the physiology of human beings. He also differed from Marxists in seeing 'society' as analyzable in ways quite distinct from the science of political economy. Durkheim is the major exponent of the view that sociology is the science of society in a quite distinct sense. Durkheim saw values as of key importance in understanding how human societies and cultures were sustained, and changed through historical time.

The problem of facts with which the sociologist deals was first clearly raised by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim pointed out that not all facts about human behaviour are necessarily social facts. The fact that thirty percent of the population has a particular hair-colouring, for example, is merely a fact about mass of individuals. So also might be the fact that a small percentage of the population is extreme racialsists. According to Durkheim, a fact is social only in so far as it exists externally to the individual and exercise constraint over him. His special conception of nature of "social reality", emphasized the involvement of normative components in both social reality and, through internalization as well as the personality of the individual. Durkheim was following, along with a few others, the major line of the theoretical development of social science.

6.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. What is a social fact, according to Durkheim?
2. What are the characteristics of social fact?
3. Social fact is a thing. Comment

6.6 Key Words

Conscience Collective: It refers to the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average members of a society form a definite system. It is largely synonymous with the concept of culture. Therefore, like culture, the collective conscience provides the link between one

generation and another. It is what is shared in the way of values and sentiments; it is what is upset and shocked by the commission of a crime and it is which defines what a crime is.

Constraint: It refers to the effect of a normative rule to which sanctions are attached, e.g. regulation.

Exteriority: It refers to the givenness of empirical existence, e.g. the physical environment.

Social Facts: A fact is social only in so far as it exists externally to the individual and exercise constraint over him.

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Unit-07 Theory of Religion

Structure

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

7.3 Theory of Religion

7.3.1 A functionalist perspective of religion

7.3.2 Durkheim and elementary forms of religious life

7.3.3 Durkheim's definition of religion

7.3.4 Sacred and profane

7.3.5 Totemism as the elementary form of religion

7.3.6 Totemism and cosmology

7.3.7 Totem and society

7.3.8 Religious rites and their social functions

7.4 Summary

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7.6 Key Words

7.7 Study Guide

7.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to understand:

- Emile Durkheim's views on religion;
- Concept of totemism and the sacred and profane;
- Views on cult of the individuals

7.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

Religion, as you are aware, is something to which human beings attach a great deal of importance. It includes a system of beliefs and practices, which help human beings, shape their actions and orientations. It binds people with other followers, bringing about a feeling of identification and unity. Sometimes it even makes people unite against followers of a different faith. Religion helps people to come to terms with the tragedies and crises of human life by providing explanations for these. It is a social phenomenon intimately connected with other social systems. The subject of religion has been one of great interest to sociologists and anthropologists. The contribution of Durkheim is very important in this regard. In this Unit, we will discuss the contributions of Durkheim to the study of religion by going over some important points made by him in his classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912).

7.3 Theory of Religion

Durkheim in his classical work “*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*”, published in the year 1912, develops his sociological theory of religion. In this work, Durkheim tries to explore the origin and cause of religion. He sought the origin of religion in society rather than in individual mind. Durkheim's main interest was the ways in which society is bound together. He investigated the role of religion in keeping society together, and sought the origin of religion in communal emotion. He thought the model for relationships between the people and the supernatural was the relationship between individual and community.

For Durkheim, religion is a group phenomenon because it is religion which gives religion its specific character and unity. On the other hand, religion unifies the group and binds the people together. This essential function of solidifying a society makes it universal and permanent institution. Durkheim develops this theory in religion by studying the aboriginal tribes of

Australia.

7.3.1 A functionalist perspective of religion

Religion is a social institution. Functional perspective analyse religion in terms of its functions or contributions that the religion makes for the meeting the functional pre-requisites of society like social solidarity, value consensus, harmony and integration between different parts of the society. According to the functionalists, religion is functional and ensures the survival of the social system. Religion is integrating forces that make the people feel that they belong to the society. It gives the people the feeling of having something in common with others in society. It is a means for the people to express collective beliefs concerning the social commitment and social solidarity. It provides a way for the people to affirm to common values, beliefs and ideals. It is collective consciousness. It also serves as the central value system.

7.3.2 Durkheim and elementary forms of religious life

Durkheim explores the functional role of religion in his book “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life”. His aim was to understand the basic forms of religious life in all societies and also to why it is a permanent social institution. Durkheim makes an in depth study of the religion of Arunta tribe of Australian aborigines, which he calls ‘the simplest and most primitive known today’. The book contains a description and a detailed analysis of the clan system and of totemism of Arunta tribes. Based on this study he developed a general theory of religion. Durkheim believed that the study of the primitive religion and its basic structure will lead to a detailed understanding of religion and religious nature of society. He takes an examination of religion from the perspective of positive science rather than from a spirit world as done by earlier theorists like Animism of Tylor, Naturism of Max Muller etc. He believed that a scientific investigation of the observable aspects of religion would lead to the discovery of most basic elements underlying the religious life, which he calls the elementary forms. The study of these elementary forms will facilitate the discovery of what is fundamental to the religious life in all societies.

He insisted that religious phenomena are communal rather than individual and religion is essentially social. For Durkheim, humans are religious because they are members of collectivities, and neither the group nor the individual can exist without religious or moral

constraint. Religion was an expression of social cohesion. In this book, Durkheim argues that the totemic gods the aborigines worship are actually expressions of their own conceptions of society itself. Religion is not imaginary but real. It is an expression of our collective consciousness.

7.3.3 Durkheim's definition of religion

Durkheim defines religion “as a unified system of beliefs and practices forbidden to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden...beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them”. Church here refers to the existence of a regularized ceremonial organization pertaining to a particular to a definite group of worshippers. The above definition of religion has two central parts. First, all religions can be defined in terms of a system of rites and beliefs. Belief refers to a set of ideas and attitudes held in relation to sacred things, where as rites refers to the system of action, which is developed towards the religious things or objects. Second, religion can defined on the basis of its tendency to divide the world in two regions, sacred and profane.

7.3.4 Sacred and profane

Durkheim argued that religion is primarily concerned with three kinds of activities: first, maintain a separation between the sacred and profane; second, laying down a system of beliefs for the faithful; third, setting up of rule that forbids certain ways of acting. Religion emerges in a society where there is distinction made between the sacred- the area that is set apart, transcendental, the extraordinary- and the profane- the realm of everyday utilitarian activities. An object becomes sacred or profane when the men choose to consider its utilitarian value, not the instrumental value. According to Durkheim, this distinction between the sacred and profane is common to all religions. He also perceived that the belief in supernatural power is not common to all religions (for example, in Buddhism there is no common deity), but separation between the sacred and profane is common. Sacred objects and behaviours are considered a part of the spiritual or religious realm, which includes the rites, the object of reverence etc. Profane does not have a religious value. Sacred may embody transcendental gods and deities and natural things and objects or beliefs, rites and practices or words, expressions or combination of words or anything socially defined as requiring special religious treatment. ‘The sacred thing’, Durkheim

wrote, 'is par excellence that which the profane should not touch and cannot touch with impunity'. The special character of the sacred is the religious prescriptions or proscriptions, which separate it radically from profane. The profane, according to Durkheim, is something subordinated in dignity to the sacred and is radically opposite to sacred. However, these two interact with each other and depend on each other for survival.

Durkheim outlines six basic characteristics of sacred and profane:

- The sacred is always separated from all other objects and therefore constitutes things that set apart.
- A system of rites and social practices arise which sets out how the sacred to be approached and how members of the group are to conduct themselves in the presence of sacred objects.
- Sacred things are things protected by interdictions which have the force of prohibitions or taboos acting to protect and isolate sacred.
- Sacred things are segregated from profane things and thought to be superior in dignity.
- The sacred and profane represent a unifying principle which separates the natural from the spiritual world and in this way provides society with a model of opposites such as good and evil, clean and dirty, holy and defiled etc.
- Passage from the profane to the sacred must be accompanied by rites which are thought to transform one state into the other through rituals of initiation or rebirth.

7.3.5 Totemism as the elementary form of religion

Durkheim studied totemism among the Australian tribes, instead of animism and naturism, because he thought it to be the most elementary form of religion and that the underlying system of beliefs and practices best exemplifies the nature of religious life. He makes a sociological investigation to the totemic beliefs and the structure of totemism and discovers the causes leading to the rise of religious sentiment in humanity. Totemism is intrinsically connected to the clan system of organisation of the Australian tribes. Totem is a material object that is believed to possess certain special properties and the clan derives its name from that totem. The members of a particular clan are not bound by blood relations but by the relation they share with the same totem. The totem is believed to possess certain mysterious or sacred force or principle that

provides sanctions for violations of taboos and inculcates moral responsibility in the group. Two clans within the same tribe cannot have the same totem. A totem may be an animal, a vegetable or any inanimate object. The sacred character of the totem manifests itself in the ritual observances, and is separated from the ordinary object that may be used to utilitarian ends. Totem is the name of the object from which beliefs and rites flow, and Durkheim calls this totem as the 'emblem' which represents the group. The totem emblem designates the name of the group and stands for the group as its badge. The totem emblem takes the form of "churinga", which according to Durkheim, is the physical embodiment of the totem and is typically a piece of wood or a polished stone on which there is a design representing the totem of the particular group. It is believed to have extraordinary sacredness and various ritual prescriptions and prohibitions surround them. Clan members are thus forbidden to kill or eat the totemic animal or plant, except at certain mystical feasts, and the violation of this interdiction is assumed to produce death instantly. Moreover, the clan members are themselves considered 'sacred' in so far as they belong to the same totemic species and are believed to have animal or vegetable ancestors. Thus, totemism as a religion has three things- the totemic emblem, the totem, and the members of the totemic clan who are considered to be sacred.

7.3.6 Totemism and Cosmology

For Durkheim religions are cosmologies because they are the primitive ways of ordering and classifying the world. Religions are a system of ideas that embraces the universality of things and gives us a complete representation of the world. The totem is divided into the sacred and profane and the divisions are projected into the nature. All things arranged in the same clan are regarded as extensions of the totemic animal, as "of the same flesh". The natural world is divided into different classes and categories and in this view all the things in the natural world, including the sun, moon, stars, earth, planets, etc. are believed to belong to different classes and groups. Thus, totemism constitutes a cosmology, in which all known things are distributed among the various clans and phratries, so that everything is classified according to the social organisation of the tribe. Such things are regarded as sharing qualities in common and are believed by the members of the clan to be affiliated to the same flesh as themselves. Since all the beliefs clearly imply a division of things between sacred and profane, they were called religious; and since they appear not only related, but inseparably connected, to the simplest form of social organisation known,

Durkheim insisted that they are surely the most elementary forms of the religious life. Durkheim also deduced that all understanding of the natural and social world derives from a religious system of ideas, since there exists a strong connection between the religious beliefs and organisation of individuals into groups.

7.3.7 Totem and society

The totemic emblem, the totem and the members of the clan all are considered sacred in totemism. Everything under a clan is considered to have certain quality of religiosity and sacredness though in varying degrees. Durkheim wanted to find out the origin of this sacredness. The religious energy found in a diffuse and all pervasive form in Australian totemism is the original source of all later more particularised incarnations of this general force which become manifest as gods, spirits and demons in more complex religions. Durkheim finds that the totem symbolises both the sacred energy and the identity of the clan group. Thus he reaches the inference that totem at the same time represents both the god and the society, and hence both god and society are the same. He argued by worshipping god people actually worshipping society itself. Society commands obligation and respect, the twin characteristics of sacred. Whether it exists as a diffuse impersonal force or whether it is personalised, the sacred object is conceived as a superior entity, which in fact symbolises the superiority of the society over the individual. This is how Durkheim draws his theory of religion.

7.3.8 Religious rites and their social functions

The beliefs and rites are found in all religions and it is one of the fundamental aspects of religion. Beliefs are the ideas and attitudes, which are held in regard to religious objects. Rites are the categories of actions taken towards sacred objects and they involve the important capacity of laying down the interdictions, which means limitations or restrictions on what is permissible with regards to the sacred. There are two broad important systems of interdicts or ritual practices; those which proscribe things or objects which are incompatible and those which require separation between the sacred profane.

Durkheim identified four distinct categories of religious rites.

1. Sacrificial rites, which are related to initiation and sacrifice. These are the class of rites, which specify and regulate the obligations individuals have toward objects of the group, which either serve the clan as a totem or are designated as fundamental to life. These include the objects related to survival such as essential foods and the powers related to regeneration. These rites involve ceremonies in which the productive powers of the natural world are celebrated. Sacrificial rites involve two important functions. They sanctify the individuals who take part in them and they re-enact and revive the collective practices and social sentiments of the group.
2. Imitative rites, permitting the imitation of the totem animal for the purpose of reproduction. These rituals imitate the various movements and habits of animals whose reproductive powers are desired. The action of these rites entails ceremonies in which individuals decorate themselves in a ritual manner by imitating the figurative forms and actions of animals or insects. In the rites of imitation the members of the tribe assume that the condition and the qualities of the objects being imitated are transferred to the members of the group and along with this something new is created. By imitating the animal's being they create the belief that the animal will be reproduced.
3. Commemorative rites are the rites which relate to how the group represents itself to the group. These rites consist solely in recollecting the past and making it present by means of representation. The function of these rites is to represent the group by putting into practice the mythical history of the ancestors from the moment they emerge and they commemorate their actions and works faithfully in a ceremony. These rites serve to sustain the vitality of the beliefs and to keep them from being forgotten. This is the way to renew the sentiments which society has of itself and its unity and strengthening the social nature of the group.
4. Piacular rites, which are rites performed to represent loss or suffering. This class of rites is reserved for assigning the ritual and religious importance to everything that involves misfortune, loss and death. Whereas the other system of rites celebrates the positive events in a group, piacular rites affirm the religious significance and seriousness of misfortune and distress. Occasions of ceremonies where the dead are mourned or where a bad harvest threatens the survival of the group involve piacular rituals. These rites

functions to renew the group to its prior state of unity preceding the misfortune and may involve all sorts of collective activity such as weeping, lamenting, kissing and wailing.

7.4 Summary

Durkheim began his enquiry of the relevance of religion in modern Europe. This quest led him to seek answers as to the role and function of religion in society. But what is religion? Durkheim's views regarding religion were quite distinct from what the social anthropologists believed. For him religion was a collective recognition of certain fundamental ideals. To better understand how religion emanates through collective effervescence and how it operates in society, Durkheim undertook a study of the totemism amongst the Arunta tribe of Australia. He concluded that totemism represented societal ideals and this comprised the sacred domain of religion. All other social domains (profane) were in some way or the other connected to the sacred. Thus the sacred domain and its ideology were the real underlying power that set up a normative order which could not be questioned. Every individual had to follow this and in doing so, it allowed for the tribal community to function. All social institutions and social phenomenon such as marriage, family, kinship, ceremonies, rites and rituals had to conform to the ideals set up by the sacred i.e. totemism.

Durkheim proposes that modern society is based on a new religion i.e. cult of the individual. In this system modern processes and practices of the state has allowed for a new moral order to emerge. This order is based on a unified system of beliefs and practices which are deemed to be sacred by the citizens of the state.

7.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Why is clan exogamy a strict rule in totemic clans?
2. Why is society worshipped, according to Durkheim?
3. Why, in the view of Durkheim, there can be no conflict between religion and science?

7.6 Key Words

Church: In the sense that Durkheim uses it, Church refers to a unified moral community sharing the same religious beliefs and practices.

Clan exogamy: A kinship rule, which forbids marriage within the clan. Marriage partners must be members of another clan.

Collective effervescence: A collective feeling of enthusiasm and excitement, which serves to strengthen bonds between individuals who feel proud to be members of the same society.

Collective representations: Durkheim uses this term to denote the ideas, thoughts and concepts of a group which result from shared perceptions, e.g., ideas of beauty, truth, right, wrong etc.

Empirical: Based on observed facts **Magic:** An activity through which individuals try to manipulate nature for positive or negative reasons. It is found in almost all simple societies and persists even in more complex ones.

Sacred and profane: The two polar opposites into which the world is divided, according to Durkheim. The ‘sacred’ refers to holy, pure, superior things; the ‘profane’ refers to ordinary, mundane ones.

7.7 Study Guide

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2. Aron, R. (1967). Main Currents in Sociological Thought. Volume 2, Penguin Books: London

Block-03 Max Weber

Unit-08 Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism

Unit-09 Theory of Authority & Bureaucracy

Unit-10 Ideal Types

Unit-11 Theory of Social Action

Unit-08 Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism

Structure

8.1 Learning Objectives

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8.4.4.4 Critical evaluation of Weber's studies on religion

8.5 Summary

8.6 Self Assessment Questions

8.7 Key Words

8.8 Study Guide

8.1 Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- discuss the meaning of religion and economy and their interconnections;
- understand the influence of the Protestant ethic on the development of modern capitalism as discussed by Weber;
- review Weber's comparative studies on three world religions, i.e. Confucianism in China, Judaism in West Asia and Hinduism in India;
- evaluate Max Weber's studies on religion and economy.

8.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

In this unit you will see the application of this idea in Weber's analysis of religion and economy. The unit starts by clarifying the meaning of the terms 'religion' and 'economy'. It then goes on to examine the inter-relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity. To bring out the inter-relationship clearly, there is discussion of the major argument in Max Weber's famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Next the unit goes into what Weber meant by the "spirit of capitalism" and contrasts it with "traditionalism". We then discuss certain aspects of the "Protestant ethic" which according to Weber, contributed to the development of capitalism in the West.

This unit further clarifies the relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity by describing three of Weber's 'comparative religious studies', namely those of Confucianism in China, Judaism in ancient West Asia and Hinduism in India. Lastly there is evaluation of his views on economy and religion.

8.3 Early Life and Works

Max Weber was born on 21 April 1864 in Erfurt, Germany, the eldest of six children. His father Max Weber Sr. was active in politics and practiced law. His mother, Helene, was well educated, deeply religious and socially conscious. As a result of his father's political prominence, Weber grew up in a home frequented by important politicians and intellectuals, such as Rudolf Von Benningsen, Theoder Mommsen, and Wilhelm Dilthey. Weber started school in 1870. He widely read history, classical literature and philosophy. He completed secondary school in 1882 and

moved on to Heidelberg University, focusing on law, economics and history. Weber returned to Berlin to study in 1884 where he obtained a university degree in law and eventually a doctorate in political economy. By 1894, he became a professor of economics. However, his studies branched out into the study of history, economics, sociology, religion and languages. Weber married in 1893, although the relationship with his wife Marianne was more intellectual than physical. She provided Weber important support and later wrote a biography of him. Marianne Weber later became a prominent leader of German feminism, and lived until 1953.

Weber had a nervous breakdown after his father's death. Later after his psychological depression, Weber travelled to the United States in 1904. This visit influenced Weber greatly, being impressed with mass political parties, voluntary citizen's organisations and other institutions which he felt helped promote freedom and democracy. He also became aware of machine politics and the necessary role of bureaucracy in 'mass democracy'. After his return to Germany, Weber completed the 'The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism' (1905). In the next years, he published some methodological essays 'The Methodology of Social Sciences', and continued his studies of major world religions in "world historical perspective". He also did extensive writing on economics and history and began his major work 'Economy and Society' (1909), although this work was never finished. Then between 1919 and 1920, Weber wrote his last academic work entitled 'A General Economic History' which was a series of lectures he gave at the University of Freiburg on the history of capitalist development.

In addition to his academic career, Weber participated in German political life and gave public addresses and lectures on issues such as politics and science which were well received and eventually became famous in their own right. In 1920 he caught pneumonia, and died at the age of 56.

Weber's writings as a whole are best known for their historical grasp of modern western societies and their economic, political, legal and religious development. The scopes of his writings are extremely broad and wide ranging, and his contribution to theoretical problems such as the formation of modern social classes, the nature of political legitimacy, the development of modern law and the study of world religions, is extensive. In addition to these themes, his work has a modern distinct emphasis, focusing on such issues as the rise of modern society, the formation of bureaucracy, the development of the modern political state and a comparative analysis of world economies and religions.

A central feature of Weber's overall work is his approach to social theory. By and large, Weber was a modernist in his overall approach to social thought. He brought together various traditions of social theory and formed a unique theoretical perspective based on history, economics, philosophy, law and comparative historical analysis. The theoretical influences in Weber's work derive from two broad schools of thought. First, was the influence of the German historical school of Carl Menger, Gustav Schmoller, Karl Knies and Heinrich Rickert. As a result of his links to the historical school, Weber became involved in a methodological controversy which forced him to take a position critical to historical economics and the methods of the natural sciences. While Weber's involvement in the controversy shaped his work for the rest of his career, it eventually brought him into contact with Heinrich Rickert, whose participation in the debate led to a key distinction between the subject matter of the social and natural sciences. A second influence on Weber's theoretical perspective was the Marxist school of economics. At the time Weber was working, Marx's writings were pervasive in Europe and at that time there were many schools of thought which were critical to Marx's economic thinking. As a result of this, Weber criticized Marx's perspective on several fronts and this led him to formulate a completely different view of the role played by history and economy in social development.

8.4 Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism

Weber wrote 'The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism' between 1903 and 1904, and published it as two separate essays in 1905 and 1906. Since its publication, The Protestant Ethic has been a controversial work that has been subject to harsh criticism by many writers for its central assertion that the ascetic regulation of economic life coupled with restraint, prudent saving and a stringent attitude toward work was religiously induced. Critical objections began to emerge from historians and theologians who claimed that Weber's argument had central weaknesses. Even today, criticism of Weber's study continues to generate controversy.

Weber located a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Western capitalism, according to Weber, assumed its shape because it was supported by a certain belief system, namely, the "the Protestant ethic". Weber argued that the Protestant ethic is associated with the spirit of capitalism. In order to bring out this interrelationship, Weber constructed ideal types of both, the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

The commercial activities of many of the Western European countries intensified along with a

simultaneous popularity of Protestantism in these societies. The capitalism of those times were identified by two contradictory activities of amassing wealth beyond the personal uses of individuals and avoidance of use of these wealth for the purpose of personal pleasure and enjoyment. Thus, Weber noticed capitalism is not only the production and exchange, money making and profit, but an ascetic attitude towards life.

8.4.1 The spirit of capitalism

The desire to earn wealth or profit is as old as human history. Wealth is regarded as a symbol of power, property and prestige. However, this desire to earn wealth got an organised form in modern or rational capitalism. Weber wanted to study this rational capitalism. Weber makes a distinction between traditional capitalism and rational capitalism. Traditional capitalism was particularly noticeable in the Italian cities. Traditional capitalism was a risky business, involving the import of luxury items from distant places. Foreign silks, spices, ivory etc. were sold to buyers at exorbitant prices. The aim was to extract maximum profit. Rational capitalism on the other hand depends on mass production and distribution of goods. Industrial revolution and factory production made this possible. Rational capitalism does not deal with a few luxury items but with almost all the daily material requirements. Rational capitalism is constantly expanding and looking for new methods, new inventions, new products and new customers. Involving methodical work and regularised transactions, it is thus qualitatively and quantitatively different from traditional capitalism.

According to Weber, capitalists earn wealth not for enjoyment of life but for earning more capital. The thirst for money making for its own sake is the very essence of modern capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system which aims at the unlimited accumulation of profit through the rational organisation of production. Capitalism arose in the Western countries like England and Germany, which experienced what we call the “Industrial Revolution”. The growth of the factory system, new techniques of production, new tools and machines made it possible for the capitalists or the owners to earn vast amounts of money. Efficiency and discipline are the pillars of capitalism. The worker was a means to an end, the end being profit. The attitude towards work was that it should be done well not because one had to do it, but because it carried an intrinsic reward.

Weber contrasted this work ethic with another type which he termed as traditionalism. Here,

workers prefer less work to more pay, relaxation to exertion. They are either unable to or unwilling to take up new work methods and techniques. In capitalism, the worker is regarded by the capitalist as a means to an end. But under traditionalism, the worker employer relationship is informal, direct and personal. Traditionalism hampers the growth of capitalism. Capitalism stresses on individualism, innovation and relentless pursuit of profit where as traditionalism is characterised by a much less disciplined and efficient system of production.

8.4.2 Features of the protestant ethic influencing the development of capitalism

Protestantism, as the name suggests, is a religion of the protest. It arose in the sixteenth century Europe during the reformation period. Its founding fathers like Martin Luther and John Calvin broke away from the Catholic Church. They felt that the Church had become too immersed in doctrines and rituals. It had lost touch with the common people. Greed, corruption and vice had gripped the Church. Priests had a life-style more suitable for princes. The Protestants tried to recapture the lost spirit of the Church. They stressed simplicity, austerity and devotion. Calvinism, founded by John Calvin, was one such sect. The followers of Calvin in Europe were known as puritans. They migrated to the continent of North America and were the founders of the American nation. Weber observed that in the West, it was by and large the Protestants who had made great progress in education and employment. They were the top bureaucrats, the most skilled technical workers and the leading industrialists. Weber was very much interested to study Calvinism. By examining its features we can see the linkage between religion and economy.

8.4.3 Features of Calvinism

- **Calvin's image of god-** God, said Calvin, was all powerful, transcendent. His divine will was unknowable. It would be foolish of any human being to try to understand God's will. It could not be understood simply because it was God's will.
- **Doctrine of predestination-** Calvinism believes that certain persons are chosen or 'elected' by God to enter heaven while the rest are dumped. The chosen will reach heaven no matter what ever they do on Earth. We cannot bribe God through prayers and sacrifices. As this Will is unknowable, we cannot change it. People can only work for their material prosperity as it would symbolise their election. We would work for the glory of God.

- **“This worldly asceticism”**- By ‘asceticism’ we mean strict discipline, control and conquest of desires. In Protestantism, particularly Calvinism Weber detected this-worldly asceticism. It stressed rigorous self-discipline in order to master the environment. A simple frugal life-style was recommended along with hard work. Worldly or sensual pleasures are denounced. Dance and music, film and theatres are thought to deviate the people from working for the glory of God. This emphasis on hard work was not confined to the Calvinists alone. It was a common feature of all Protestant sects. The idea that ‘honesty is the best policy’ was the principle of early capitalism. The fruits of hard labour could not be spent on worldly pleasures. Thus there was only one outlet for money. It was reinvested and hence used to make more money. Calvinists believe that ‘work is worship’ and ‘time is money’.
- **The notion of “calling”**- The Calvinist ethic holds that all work is important and sacred. It is not mere work, it is a calling or a mission and should be performed with devotion and sincerity.

Weber summarized the Calvinists ethics in five points-

- a. There exists an absolute transcendent God who created the world and rules it, but is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the finite minds of men.
- b. This all powerful and mysterious God had predestined each of us to salvation or damnation, so that we cannot by our works alter a divine decree which was made before we were born.
- c. God created the world for his own glory.
- d. Whether he is to be damned or saved, man is obliged to work for the glory of God and to create the Kingdom of God on Earth.
- e. Earthly things, human nature, and flesh belong to the order of sin and death and salvation can come to man only through divine grace.

This helped to create a disciplined and dedicated workforce without which capitalism could not have emerged. Hard-work, saving and re-investment and the desire to prosper have a strong affinity with the “spirit of capitalism”. Working day and night and not enjoying the fruits of that labour might seem very irrational to most of us. But if we keep in mind the “doctrine of predestination” and the need to prosper to prove one’s “election” by God, this

irrational behaviour makes sense.

8.4.4 Weber's comparative studies on religion

It is quite evident by now that Weber has tried to establish a link between religious ethics on the one hand and economic behaviour on the other. After establishing the role of Protestant ethic in the development of Western Capitalism, Weber made an attempt to search for whether a worldly asceticism of which Protestant ethic is a typical example exist outside the Western civilisation. Weber found that modern capitalism with its unique features that developed in the Western Europe did not develop in any other part of the world except there. The only factor that was lacking in the non-West is a particular religious ethic. Weber makes a comparative study of the world religions in order to find out what is absent in many of these world religions, which could not help in the development of modern capitalism that was developed in the modern Western societies.

8.4.4.1 The Religion of China: Confucianism

In traditional China, there were certain important developments which Weber distinguishes as conducive for capitalism and a rationalised economy. These include the emergence of cities and guilds, the formation of monetary systems, the development of law, and the achievement of political integration within the patrimonial state. But there were some significant differences. Weber found the religious and other conditions in China greatly limited the rationalisation of the economy. He observed that though private property emerged in China, it could not become truly private as in the West. The community or the 'sib' is powerful in China. The power of the sib rested to a large extent on the ancestor cult. The ancestral spirits acted as mediators between their decedents and god. The sib and the other traditional elements were stronger than the rational bureaucracy. The illiterate old aged people carried higher status and authority than the learned bureaucrats. Chinese justice far from being formal, legal and rational remained patriarchal in nature. All these kept the kinship relations tightly knitted and prevented the rational development of the individual.

There were some other religious factors that inhibited the development of rational capitalism in Chinese society. In Confucianism, the social order is considered to be eternal and inevitable.

What is most valued in Confucianism is the cultivated man, who behaves with universal dignity and prosperity, and who is in unison with himself and the outside world. Self-control, the regulation of emotion is demanded by this ethic since harmony of the soul is the ultimate good; passion must not be allowed to disturb this balance. The notion of sin and the corresponding concept of salvation were absent. While Confucianism emphasised on self control, there was no specific emphasis on asceticism.

Confucianism facilitated the belief in magic and animism. It was not only tolerated but also systematized and rationalised so that they become tremendous power in Chinese life. All the sciences, which had empirical and naturalistic beginnings, were completely rationalised as magical and supernatural practices and rituals. As Weber puts it, Chinese world, despite its secular, rational-empirical elements, remained enchanted. The secular bureaucracy too tolerated magic as a means of taming the masses and also they themselves believed in it.

Weber argues in spite of the various factors which might have acted to promote the rise of rational capitalism, it did not rise spontaneously in China because of the absence of ethical code that was present in Protestantism.

8.4.4.2 The Religion of India: Hinduism

Hinduism differed from other world religions in some important aspects. It is an eclectic and tolerant religion. It is marked by caste system based on vertical segregation of occupational categories. There exist in Hinduism some dogmas or beliefs that are shared by most of the believers. The most important of these are those of the transmigration of souls and the notion of 'karma'. Both these dogmas are directly bound up with the social ordering of caste system existing in Indian society. Karma is the belief that actions of this world or this life have a consequence for the next life. Karma is a cycle of rebirth, which guarantees status mobility for the individual in the next birth on the basis of his performance of his duty in this birth. The social impact of the karma philosophy is that it prevents the individual from searching for the better occupations. It confines him to what is assigned to him through his caste system.

Weber argued that Hinduism lacked an ethic conducive for the development of capitalism, though there existed in the Indian society the social and cultural conditions, which should have given rise to modern rational capitalism. The caste system in the Hindu society tried to ritually stabilize the occupational structure and hampered the rationalisation of the economy. The

Brahmins, the highest of the caste group, held the highest status and the status of other caste groups, which are actually hereditary caste groups, depend on their proximity of distance from the Brahmins. The Brahmins kept the larger masses of the society servile to them with the help of magical (purity and pollution) and mystical elements.

These orthodox Hindu beliefs, according to Weber, acted as barriers to the challenges emerging in the existing social order. Although trade and manufacturing flourished in India, the caste system and the ascendancy of Brahmin priesthood and strong belief in religious dogmas such as Karma philosophy effectively prevented any further economic development. Based on the studies of the Asiatic religions (that of India, China, Ceylon and Korea), Weber concluded that although there existed economic strata and forms conducive for the emergence of a modern rational economy, the East was still dominated by magical mentality. This hindered the economic development in particular and rationalisation of the culture in general. The western civilisation had undergone a significant amount of disenchantment of rationalisation giving rise to modern capitalism.

8.4.4.3 Ancient Judaism

This is the religion of the Jews who originally inhabited the land of Palestine in West Asia. Judaism is the oldest of the monotheistic religions. It is a religion that speaks of one, all-powerful and almighty god. The Jews believe themselves to be the chosen ones of god or “Yahweh”. Their prophets united them in the belief that they were the chosen ones of god and must help to establish God’s kingdom on Earth. Judaism, unlike Confucianism and Hinduism speaks of an ethic of mastery over the environment, not harmony.

Judaism, says Weber, could have generated the “spirit of capitalism”. However, certain historical forces prevented this. The exodus or the mass migration of Jews from their homeland due to persecution left them scattered all over the world. Their economic participation was restricted to money-lending, which they did very successfully.

So we can see mere material conditions like finance, trade and technology are not enough to promote capitalism. India and China had both of these, yet the value systems of these societies were such that the pursuit of wealth for own sake and rational organisation of work to achieve this purpose did not make sense. It did not fit in with the ethos or the ideals of these societies.

8.4.4.4 Critical evaluation of Weber's studies on religion

Weber's work on religion and economy has often been subjected to criticism. Some scholars feel that he has concentrated very selectively on certain aspects of religious ethics and interpreted them very narrowly so that they fit in with his theory. For instance, in his studies on the Hindu ethic, Weber has seen only one aspect of the Hindu ethic and has over emphasized the fatalistic and passive aspect of it. Some scholars would argue that the notions of 'karma' and 'dharma' actually spur individuals to act, to perform their duties, to live up to their obligations. It is pointed out that the concept of calling which forms the very foundation of the spirit of capitalism is also prevalent in Hinduism. The principle in the Bhagwad Gita of doing one's duty without thinking of benefit is similar to the doctrine of calling which is the focal point of material progress in the West.

Milton Singer has presented a functional equivalent of the Protestant Ethic in India in his study of the leading industrialists of the city of Madras. To him caste background and tradition may equally be fitted for the industrial development in India. Caste based division of labour has been used successfully in the specialisation of industrial workers. Singer observed that through the process of "compartmentalisation", many industrialists kept their business obligations and ritual obligations separate or in distinct compartments. Hence, there was no conflict between an individual's role as a businessman on the one hand and a religious person on the other. According to Singer, if capitalism is to be developed in India then it must not be an aping of the West that destroys the traditional way of life. Capitalism can rather develop within the given cultural norms and institutions of our society.

8.5 Summary

The unit began with explanations of the concepts of 'religion' and 'economy'. It tried to see the link between the two as described by Max Weber. Then it discussed the major argument put forward by Weber for the development of rational capitalism in the West. It presented his argument for the non-development of capitalism in China, in West Asia and in India. Finally, it looked at some criticisms of Weber's theory raised in the context of Indian society.

8.6 Self Assessment Questions

- Confucianism stressed on what?
- According to Weber, Hindus were not motivated to work hard because-
- Capitalism did not develop in ancient Palestine because-

8.7 Key Words

Catholic Church: It is also called the Church of Rome. Its headquarters are in the Vatican City and the head of the Church is the Pope. Before the Reformation, it was the central Church of the Christian religion. After the Reformation, a number of sects broke away from it, e.g. Calvinists, Lutherans, Baptists etc.

Capital Accumulation: This means the stock piling of resources, which can be reinvested into industry so that industry may expand.

Exodus: It relates to the departure of the Jews from West Asia because of religious persecution.

Industrial Revolution: This term refers to the striking changes in the economic sphere in the period 1750-1850. England was the home of this Revolution, which then spread to all parts of Europe. New discoveries like steam power, inventions like the power loom, spinning frame etc. revolutionised production. The factory system and capitalism rose in this period.

Reformation: Religious revolution in Western Europe in the sixteenth century protesting against the corruption of the Church. It led to the formation of Protestant sects, which broke away from the Catholic Church.

8.8 Study Guide

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Unit-09 Theory of Authority & Bureaucracy

Structure

- 9.1 Learning Objectives**
- 9.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge**
- 9.3 Concept of Authority**
- 9.4 Elements of Authority**
- 9.5 Types of Authority**
 - 9.5.1 Traditional Authority**
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 - 9.5.3 Rational legal authority**
- 9.6 Theory of Bureaucracy**
 - 9.6.1 Weber's of notion of bureaucracy**
 - 9.6.2 Characteristics of bureaucracy**
 - 9.6.3 Concept of 'office' in bureaucratic organization**
 - 9.6.4 Consequences of bureaucracy**
- 9.7 Summary**
- 9.8 Self Assessment Questions**
- 9.9 Key Words**
- 9.10 Study Guide**

9.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the concept of authority as explained by Max Weber;
- learn Weber's types of authority;
- describe in detail the three types of authority namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal;
- describe bureaucracy as the instrument for the operation of rational-legal authority.

9.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

In this unit, you will find some of Weber's important contributions in understanding bureaucracy and authority. In the first section, there is a brief discussion of the sociological concept of authority with special reference to Weber's understanding of the term. The second section will mention the types of authority that flow from them, namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority. The third section will focus on the instrument through which rational-legal authority is exercised, namely, bureaucracy.

9.3 Concept of Authority

Weber uses the German word "Herrschaft" to refer to the concept of authority. Herrschaft is a situation in which a 'Herr' or master dominates or commands others. Raymond Aron (1967: 187) defines Herrschaft as the master's ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him.

Now the question arises, what is the difference between power and authority? Power refers to the ability or capacity to control another. Authority refers to legitimised power. It means that the master has the right to command and can expect to be obeyed.

9.4 Elements of Authority

For a system of authority to exist the following elements must be present.

- a. An individual ruler/master or a group of ruler/masters.
- b. An individual/group that is ruled.

- c. The will of the ruler to influence the conduct of the ruled which may be expressed through commands.
- d. Evidence of the influence of the rulers in terms of the compliance or obedience showed by the ruled.
- e. Direct or indirect evidence which shows that the ruled have internalised and accepted the fact that the ruler's commands must be obeyed.

Authority implies a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers believe that they have the legitimate right to exercise their authority. On the other hand, the ruled accept this power and comply with it, reinforcing its legitimacy.

9.5 Types of Authority

Authority implies legitimacy. According to Weber, there are three systems of legitimation, each with its corresponding norms, which justify the power to command. It is these systems of legitimation which are designated as the following types of authority.

- a. Traditional authority
- b. Charismatic authority
- c. Rational-legal authority

9.5.1 Traditional Authority

Authority is traditional, according to Weber, when its legitimacy is based on tradition and custom and on the sanctity of age old rules and powers. Compliance to traditional authority is owed not to an objective system of legal rules but to the framework of obligations which bind individuals to the ruler by personal loyalties. Obligation to obey commands derives from the traditional status of the ruler and the ruler's power to command respect and honour based on tradition. Here, leaders obtain their powers from inherited right and are seen as legitimate in the light of customary rights and traditional rules. Monarchies and the landholding aristocracies of the feudal period are historical examples of traditional authority or domination. In societies where traditional authority is dominant, duty and obedience is owed not to the enacted rules as such, but rather to the individual leader.

The authority of the ruler is obtained in two ways. First, by the prestige conferred by tradition,

and by the belief that the ruler's commands are valid because of the authority inherent in the office, or the authority inherent in the traditional right of the ruler. Second, rulers have authority by the virtue of the discretionary powers which are conferred upon them by titles or hereditary claims to powers. In this case, power exists in the form of traditional prerogatives, privileges and rights which tend to confer almost unlimited authority to the leader. Ruler is considered to be the personal master, followers are formally the 'subject' to the ruler and the obedience is not owed to enacted rules and traditions, but to the person who occupies the position of authority. Similarly, the relationship between the ruler and their followers is defined by personal loyalty, rather than being defined by impersonal legal precepts and contractual agreements.

A second characteristic of traditional authority is that the ruler's command are perceived to be valid by virtue of the leader's inherited right to exercise personal discretion. The ruler is free from specific rules and obligations that would be binding on his conduct and, in such circumstances, the ruler is not bound by specific rules, rather acts on the basis of 'good will' even though it may not be legally binding on the rulers as such.

There are two formal types of administrative authorities within traditional domination-patrimonial and patriarchal. Patrimonial administration is common in feudal societies where traditional authority is prevalent, and where the landholder exercises power entirely without administrative staff. Here, rulers may rely on the family members, or subordinate dependents or slaves to perform specific functions for the master. Patrimonial administration tends to be based on, what Weber called, a system of favourites who perform functions for rulers out of loyalty or obligation. Individuals who occupy official positions are invariably personal followers of the master whose ties to the master are reinforced by loyalty and customary obligation. This form of authority, according to Weber, leads to arbitrary decision making which follows the personal direction of the ruler, rather than a strict set of administrative rules which equally apply to everyone.

Weber thought that traditional system of authority tends to resist bureaucratic development and the differentiation of power into separate offices or office holders. It lacks rationally established hierarchies of offices, technical training and clearly delineated jurisdiction of powers and responsibilities. Tasks are assigned on the basis of the discretion of the master, and roles are often performed by individuals who are tied to household positions.

9.5.2 Charismatic Authority

The term charisma has its origin in religious history and essentially means the gift or grace. Weber used the term to refer to ‘a certain quality of an individual’s personality which is considered extraordinary and treated as capable of having supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers and qualities’ of some kind. Charismatic leaders, according to Weber, are believed to have capabilities which are not accessible to ordinary individuals, and their powers are regarded as having a divine origin, and on this they come to hold power and are treated by others as leaders. These individuals, said Weber, can be prophets, persons with reputations, devout religious believers or heroes in war. The powers manifested in these individuals are thought to transcend the routines of everyday life and are believed to rest on magical powers. Leaders of this type may emerge from ordinary population and announce themselves as saviours. What is important for Weber here is that, the individual’s power is regarded by others as valid and true. Their devotion to the leader is unquestioned.

In Charismatic domination or authority, Weber reasoned, the leader’s claim to legitimacy originates from two related levels of belief: first is the level which derives legitimacy from people’s belief that the leader is to be followed because of extraordinary capacities and powers of personal inspiration and unique ethical vision. Second is the level which derives legitimacy from what Weber calls the degree of ‘felt duty’ which the followers believe is put upon them to carry out the demands or commands of the leader. People adhere to the authority of the ruler on the basis of an inner conviction which they expect will resolve long standing inner conflicts and suffering. This psychological connection to the leader in creases the followers to suspend any critical judgements regarding the abilities of the leader.

Mahatma Gandhi’s struggle for against British domination in India is an explicit example of Charismatic leadership. Gandhi based his acts on principles he referred to as ‘ideal truths’ and on activities he called ‘purification’ which acted to create in the believer the idea that Gandhi was the embodiment of a holy spirit. Similar to this is the mobilisation of the American Civil Rights Movement in 1962 by Martin Luther King. Weber argued that one of the central features of Charismatic authority is the tendency of the leader to reject the desire and needs of everyday life. Such a rejection created a necessity on the part of the ruler to transcend everyday activity by emotional difference, renunciation of desire and repudiation of worldly pleasure and material property. The Dalai Lama’s rejection of the material world of everyday life for higher religious

duties is based on the religious rejection of the world as it is. Weber believed that Charismatic authority often emerges during periods of social crises. He argued that the charismatic leaders often come to power in a time of crisis either because the 'nation' or the 'people' are thought to be on the brink of a political or economical catastrophe or believed the established way of doing things are seen as inadequate. For example, Adolf Hitler came to power in the 1930s when Germany was in a severe economic crisis.

The administrative staffs of the charismatic leader have no appointed officials or a hierarchy of offices, and its members are not technically trained. Appointments to offices or positions are made by the leader who personally selects disciples or followers who commit themselves to serve the leader because of their beliefs in the leader's powers. Their service to the leader may function in the form of sacrifice based on the renunciation of their own interests for those of the leader's interests. Under these circumstances, the performances of administrative functions are carried out by trusted disciples rather than by appointed office holders. Weber believed that charismatic authority does not adhere to norms of rational decision making and therefore resists the tendency to bureaucratic administration.

9.5.3 Rational legal authority

It is a system of domination characterised by legal authority where legitimacy rests on 'rational grounds' and on the belief in the inherent 'legality of enacted rules'. Modern democracies are examples of rational-legal authority or legal domination. In this case, those who have been elevated to political authority under the rule of law have the right to issue commands and form a system of legitimate authority. Compliance is owed to those issuing commands based on the principles of law rather than personal authority of the ruler. A key characteristic of rational-legal authority is that the officials in power are themselves subject to laws and must orient their action to an impersonal order of legal rules at their disposition. Since the operation and organisation of this system of domination takes the form of legality, the total system of laws and judicial framework leads to a form of administrative organisation which grows out of the principle of legality and the authority of law. Weber took the view that the administrative apparatus in legal authority tends to be bureaucratic in orientation and this, Weber thought, is reflected in the organisation of offices, the chain of command, an administrative staff of functionaries and the use of official files. Offices which are governed in this way function as administrative agencies

with clearly defined limits imposed upon their powers and decision making. Officials are either elected or appointed to a term of office. Rational norms dictate that all administrative acts be put in writing.

The connection between legal authority and a bureaucratically organised means of administration is central to Weber's thinking in a number of ways. First, he believed that bureaucratic administration was technically the most efficient means of exercising authority over people, and the bureaucratic development was at the basis of the Western Democratic state. Second, he thought that a system defined by legality led to an organisation of offices based on an official hierarchy that relates to offices in terms of their function and to specified jurisdictions in terms of authority. More than any other system of domination, Weber believed that legal authority eliminates arbitrariness in the exercise of power, and that it replaces forms of authority of the past where power was exercised by status privilege or by the sheer application of physical force.

9.6 Theory of Bureaucracy

A bureaucracy is a body of non elective government officials and/or an administrative policymaking group. Historically, bureaucracy referred to government administration managed by departments staffed with nonelected officials. In modern parlance, bureaucracy refers to the administrative system governing any large institution. Since being coined, the word "bureaucracy" has developed negative connotations for some. Bureaucracies are criticized for their complexity, their efficiency, and their inflexibility. However, others have defended the existence of bureaucracies. The German sociologist Max Weber argued that bureaucracy constitutes the most efficient and rational way in which human activity can be organized, and that systematic processes and organized hierarchies were necessary to maintain order, maximize efficiency and eliminate favouritism. But even Weber saw bureaucracy as a threat to individual freedom, in which the increasing bureaucratization of human life traps individuals in an "iron-cage" of rule based rational control.

The term 'bureaucracy' is French in origin, and combines the French word 'bureau'- desk or office- with the Greek word kratos- rule or political power. It was coined sometime in the mid-1700s by the French economist Jacques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay, and was a satirical pejorative from the outset. Gournay never wrote the term down, but was later quoted at length in a letter.

The first known English-language use was in 1818. The 19th century definition referred to a system of governance in which offices were held by unelected career officials, and in this sense “bureaucracy” was seen as a distinct form of government, often subservient to a monarchy. In the 1920s, the definition was expanded by the German sociologist Max Weber to include any system of administration conducted by trained professionals according to fixed rules. Weber saw the bureaucracy as a relatively positive development.

9.6.1 Weber’s of notion of bureaucracy

Max Weber described many idealised types of public administration and government in His work “Economy and Society” (1922). It was Weber who began the studies of bureaucracy and whose works led to the popularisation of the term. As the most efficient and rational way of organizing, bureaucratization for Weber was the key part of the rational-legal authority and he saw it as the key process in the ongoing rationalisation of the Western society. Weber essentially argues that bureaucracy constitutes the most efficient and rational way in which human activity can be organized, and that is indispensable to the modern world.

Weber listed several preconditions for the emergence of bureaucracy. The growth in space and population being administered, the growth in complexity of the administrative tasks being carried out, the existence of a monetary economy requires a more efficient administrative system. Development of transport and communication technologies makes more efficient administration possible.

9.6.2 Characteristics of bureaucracy

Bureaucracy refers to the management of large organizations characterized by hierarchy, fixed rules, impersonal relationships, rigid adherence to procedures, and highly specialized division of labour. Weber suggests the characteristics of bureaucracy as following:

- A bureaucratic administration presupposes a chain of command that is hierarchically organised. It follows a clearly defined structure of offices and positions with duly assigned responsibilities. It is based on different levels of authority, jurisdiction, due process and correct rulings.

- A system of impersonal rules governs the rights and duties of positional incumbents and the adherence to rules always prevail over emotional or ethical considerations.
- The management of modern offices is based upon the written documents (files), which are preserved in their original form.
- Bureaucratic officials receive contractually fixed salaries and do not own their offices or means of production. This creates an official separation between the administrative sphere of responsibility and the private affairs of the official.
- It presupposes a system of impersonal guidelines for dealing with and defining work responsibilities. Rules are defined for typical cases and officials deal with them effectively by applying uniform rules and procedures. Decision making is carried out with regard to a reliance on technical knowledge and the concept of the expert prevails.
- A bureaucracy is predicted on a clearly defined division of labour based upon functional specialization of tasks and a well defined hierarchy of authority. Authority is strictly defined and officials take orders only from those immediately above them in rank.
- Within the bureaucracy, norms of impersonality govern inter-personal relations.
- Bureaucratic officials are inclined to treat people in terms of 'cases' rather than as individuals. They remain impersonal in their contacts with the public.
- Written documents and a rigid orientation to files is a precondition to legitimate decision making.

9.6.3 Concept of 'office' in bureaucratic organization

According to Weber, office refers to a sphere of legal authority that is granted to an area of work which is under the administrative jurisdiction of an official and their directives. Bureaucratic office holders often obtain their position by appointment to public service which is in accord with the vocation of the office holder. The officers are required to undergo prescribed courses of training and are required to take special examinations which function as preconditions to employment and service. Officials perform their function as duties which are executed as administrative functions. Functions and duties of the officials are defined by legal rules and legislations. Any official breaking the legal rules of the official is apt to be removed from his post. Loyalty to the office owes allegiance to the framework of legal rules which are

contractually enforced. Higher status in the office gives greater authority and lower status demands less expertise and the authority of the official is weakened.

It is the norm for the bureaucratic officials that the officials are to be appointed by their seniors. If they are elected by those they govern, they immediately lose their bureaucratic character. It is because of the fact that elected officials tend to be autonomous in relation to their superiors and are directly accountable to the people who elected them.

9.6.4 Consequences of bureaucracy

Max Weber basically outlines two major consequences of bureaucracy:

- i. First consequence of incompatibility of bureaucracy with democracy. As soon as bureaucracy develops, the governed tend to accept the authority of bureaucratic decision making without question and in doing so they give up the right to accountable government. Moneyed elites tend to wield power over bureaucratic agencies through political donations in exchange for patronage positions. This gives rise to economic interest groups who lobby state officials to advance their interests by manipulating the structure of power.
- ii. Second consequence of bureaucracy is the tendency to develop secrecy, especially in regard to the knowledge they hold and to their intentions or their plans. This leads to the exclusion of the public from decision making and from participation in the production of consensus. Bureaucratic institutions thus become closed, and this entails a loss of democracy.

9.7 Summary

This unit began with a discussion of the Weberian concept of ‘authority’. It then went on to discuss the types of authority identified by Max Weber. Next you studied traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority in some detail. Finally, the unit focused upon bureaucracy as the instrument through which rational-legal authority operates. Not only did the unit outline the features of a bureaucratic office but also the officials or staff that constitute it.

9.8 Self Assessment Questions

1. **Write an example of Bureaucracy.**
2. Mention in three lines important features of bureaucratic authority.
3. Mention in four lines important characteristics of the officials of bureaucracy.

9.9 Key Words

Power: One's capacity to impose his or her will on others.

Authority: When power is legitimised it becomes authority.

Ideal type: A methodological tool developed by Weber through which the most commonly found features of a phenomenon are abstracted. Ideal type is an analytical construct with which the social scientist compares existing reality.

Routinisation: A process of transformation of the charismatic authority either into traditional or rational legal authority.

Money-economy: Any economic transaction made in terms of money.

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Unit-10 Ideal Types

Structure

- 10.1 Learning Objectives**
- 10.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge**
- 10.3 Construction of ideal types**
- 10.4 Characteristics of ideal types**
- 10.5 Categories of ideal types**
 - 10.5.1 Historical Ideal Types**
 - 10.5.2 Abstract Elements of Social Reality**
 - 10.5.3 Reconstruction of a particular type of behaviour**
- 10.6 Purpose of ideal types**
- 10.7 Critical comments on ideal types**
- 10.8 Summary**
- 10.9 Self Assessment Questions**
- 10.10 Key Words**
- 10.11 Study Guide**

10.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- discuss the meaning and characteristics of ideal types;
- describe the purpose and use of ideal types in social sciences;
- narrate Max Weber's use of ideal type in his major works.

10.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

Weber first developed the concept of the 'ideal type' in a writing entitled 'Objectivity in the Social Sciences and Social Policy' which was published in the year 1905. Weber used ideal type as a methodological tool to describe the comparative features of different societies by outlining the distinct social characteristics.

According to New Webster's Dictionary 'ideal' is a 'conception or a standard of something in its highest perfection'. It refers to a mental image or conception rather than a material object. It is a model. The term 'type' means a kind, class or group as distinguished by a particular character. Thus generally speaking, we may conceptualise ideal type as a kind, category, class or group of objects, things or persons with particular character that seems to be the best example of it. He defined ideal type as a 'conceptual pattern which brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex whole whose purpose is to describe historical societies by comparing their internal and external characteristics'. In other words, ideal type is a mental construct, like a model, for the scrutiny and the systematic characterisation of a concrete situation. Indeed, he used ideal type as a methodological tool to understand and analyse social reality. Max Weber was particularly concerned with objectivity in social sciences. Hence, he used ideal type as a methodological tool that looks at reality objectively. It scrutinises, classifies, systematises and defines social reality without subjective bias. Ideal type does not deal with values. Ideal types are concepts formulated on the basis of facts collected carefully and analytically for empirical research.

10.3 Construction of ideal types

Ideal types are constructed or formulated by the abstraction and combination of a number of elements, which though found in reality, are rarely or never discovered in specific form. For the

construction of ideal types, the sociologist selects a number of traits from the whole which is otherwise confusing and obscure, to constitute an intelligible entity. For example, if we wish to study Democracy in India, we mention some of the essential characteristics of Democracy like existence of a multi-party system, universal adult franchise, formation of government by people's representatives, people's participation in the decision making process, equality before law, respect to majority verdict etc. This formulation of a pure type or an ideal type concept of Democracy will guide us and work as a tool in our analysis. Any deviation from and conformity to it will unfold its reality. Ideal types, therefore, do not consider the common or average characteristics but focus on the typical and essential characteristics.

One thing should be kept in mind that though ideal types are constructed from facts existing in reality, they do not describe or represent the total reality; they are of pure types in the logical sense. According to Weber, 'in its conceptual purity, this ideal mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality'.

10.4 Characteristics of ideal types

Some of the important characteristics of ideal types are as follows:

- i. **Ideal types are mental constructs or subjective in nature.** As Weber has stated more positively the ideal types are mental constructs which are ideal in the 'logical sense', that is, they state a logical extreme. They depend on our capacity for comprehension and imagination. For example, we have ideal types about perfect health, church, state of equilibrium, perfect religion, democracy etc.
- ii. Since ideal types are mental constructs, they do not exactly correspond to the reality. Ideal types are constructed in such a way that they are kept at a distance from the real world. Though they are constructed out of many actual facts, they themselves do not exactly correspond to the actual facts in each and every aspect. They are mental constructs created to understand reality and they themselves do not have actual existence. Differences are found between ideal constructs and actual situations. Thus, not all the characteristics will be present in the real world, but any particular situation may be understood by comparing it with the ideal type. For example, individual bureaucratic organisations may not exactly match the elements in the ideal type bureaucracy, but the type can illuminate these variations. Ideal types are therefore

- hypothetical constructions, formed from real phenomena, which have an explanatory value.
- iii. **Ideal types as theoretical tools:** though ideal types are not actualities and remain as our mental constructs they function as theoretical tools to understand the reality. “Its function is the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergences or similarities, to describe them with most unambiguously intelligible concepts and to understand and to understand and explain them casually.”
 - iv. **Ideal types are not the instruments to denote statistical average:** The ideal type is not a description of those factors or laws which are thought to be found on the average in that kind of configuration....For example, the Protestant Ethic does not indicate the average behaviour of all the Protestants. Similarly, honesty does not indicate the average behaviour of all the honest people that the society has witnessed.
 - v. **Ideal types signify “pure” or “abstract” types and do not indicate anything that is normatively desirable.** As Weber himself has stated that ideal types have “no connection at all with value-judgements, and it has nothing to do with any type of perfection there than a purely logical one.” There are thus all sorts of ideal types of brothels as well as religions [Weber], Totalitarianism is no less an ideal type than democracy, for example, for both are abstract constructs with which we can compare and contrast actual political systems in order to see their various characteristics more clearly. It is a “methodological device”, that is all. It is not ideal ethically good or right.
 - vi. Ideal types are not hypotheses and hence the question of proving or disproving them and establishing general laws does not arise here. Weber in his studies in the Sociology of Religion examined the relationship between the religious ethics and in various societies and elements of economic development there. But this was not to establish general laws about the relationships between “religious ethics” and “economic development”. It was essentially to check the sufficiency and validity of his ideal type of relationship between the Protestant ethic and industrial capitalism of Western Europe.

- vii. It is essentially a one sided model. It deliberately emphasises those imputations thought to be worth postulating and testing. In this sense, it is purely selective, and of the nature of experiment.
- viii. An ideal type does provide an exhaustive description of a social phenomenon. Many ideal types can be constructed about any specific configuration, each selectively emphasising one point of view and submitting its particular imputations to test.
- ix. Ideal types are not rigid and fixed things but are subject to change. Ideal types are abstract in nature and reside in our imagination. They are changeable and subject to consideration from time to time. They are affected by social thinking and social environment and hence cannot be permanent.

10.5 Categories of ideal types

10.5.1 Historical Ideal Types

These can be described as ideal types that select general concepts that are common to a wide range of different social characteristics that exist among historical societies. In this case, historical ideal types begin by selecting features of different societies on the basis of their common characteristics, and employ a criterion of selection of general concepts which are precisely definable and which may include concepts such as Protestantism, feudalism and capitalism. In this case, the ideal type is designed to capture features of empirical reality by arriving at what Weber refers to as the ‘analytical accentuation’ of certain aspects of social historical reality. For example, when we attempt to understand the development of a city economy, and when we engage in these sorts of ideal type comparisons we ‘construct the concept of a city economy’ and thus get closer to it.

An ideal type is thus a ‘picture of events’ which approximates the reality of a given society under certain conditions of its organisation. The characteristics of a city economy include elements such as a rational market, a system of law based on statutes, the decline of magic and a system of private property. Other related traits may include the concept of a citizen, a municipal organization and a bureaucracy with political office holders. Weber thought that it is only possible to formulate the concept of a city economy by isolating what is essential from what is inessential. The ideal type, therefore, does not serve as a description of concrete historical reality,

but simply as a construct used to elucidate the features of historical reality. This is carried out by extracting essential traits or characteristics which elaborate concepts by comparing them with the concrete features of the social structure. These traits are then compared to an ideal picture of social reality, and from this a workable type is formed. When applied to reality, said Weber, ideal types are useful in research and in social and historical description because they function by arranging what initially were indistinct traits into a consistent construct by an elucidation of their essential elements.

10.5.2 Abstract Elements of Social Reality

These elements of social reality are found in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Bureaucracy and types of authority are important examples of these abstract elements.

While explaining bureaucracy, Weber pointed out that bureaucracy was the best administrative form for the rational or efficient pursuit of organisational goals. Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy comprised various elements such as (a) high degree of specialisation and a clearly-defined division of labour, with tasks distributed as official duties, (b) hierarchical structure of authority with clearly circumscribed areas of command and responsibility, (c) establishment of a formal body of rules to govern the operation of the organisation and administration based on written documents, (d) impersonal relationships between organisational members and the clients, (e) recruitment of personnel based on ability and technical knowledge, (f) long term employment, promotion on the basis of seniority and merit, (g) fixed salary and the separation of private and official income.

Though examples of developed bureaucracies existed in different parts of the world prior to the emergence of modern capitalism, it is only within this that organisations are found which approximate to this ideal typical form. Weber used these abstract elements of bureaucracy to explain a concrete phenomenon.

To understand the various aspects of authority Max Weber constructed its ideal types in terms of three types of authority. These are traditional, rational and charismatic.

Traditional authority is based upon the belief in the sanctity of age old customs and rules. Rational authority is maintained by laws, decrees, and regulations. Charismatic authority is characterised by exceptional virtue possessed by or attributed to the leader by those who follow the leader, have confidence in the leader and are devoted to the leader.

Hence the construction of a pure type of bureaucracy and authority helps the sociologists as an ideal type “which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity”.

10.5.3 Reconstruction of a particular type of behavior

This ideal type includes those elements that constitute rationalising reconstructions of a particular kind of behaviour. For example, according to Weber, all propositions in economic theory are merely ideal typical reconstructions of the ways people would behave if they were pure economic subjects. These include laws of supply and demand, marginal utilities etc. Supply of commodity in the market governs prices in relation to demand. Similarly, utility of a commodity for consumption is higher or lower depending upon the units available for consumption. Economic theory rigorously conceives economic behaviour as consistent with its essence. This essence is often defined in a precise manner.

10.6 Purpose of ideal types

According to Weber, an ideal type serves the following purposes.

- a.** It can be used to make judgements about whether the type of society referred to in concrete reality actually exists and to what extent its characteristics can be made clear and understandable.
- b.** It is an indispensable tool for the purpose of a comparative analysis of different societies and for developing an understanding of their social and historical characteristics, and how these may change over time.
- c.** While an ideal type is not a description of reality, it can be used to assist in reducing ambiguity about empirical reality by providing the means to foster adequate descriptions of it.
- d.** As a methodology the ideal type leads to the formation new concepts about the social and economic organisation of societies by inviting historical comparisons of given social types that are within the conceptual boundaries of history and reality.

10.7 Critical comments on ideal types

Though Weber’s concept of “ideal type” has been well appreciated by scholars it is not free from

criticisms. Some of the criticisms levelled against the concept are briefed here:

- a. Though the ideal type is a “mental construct” many a times it is confused to be the “actual reality” itself.
- b. There is also the possibility of considering the “ideal type as a procrustean bed into which data are forced in.”
- c. The “ideal type” is often made a theory and the ideas or things that it represents are often taken to be the ideas and things that are very much found in the real world.
- d. It is commented that the concept of “ideal type” is very complex and only an expert sociologist can understand and make use of it efficiently.
- e. Though “ideal types” are very significant in the study of social sciences, their usage is somewhat limited because they cannot be used in all types of social analysis.
- f. There are critics who argue that “ideal type analysis should be dropped as utterly inappropriate to sociological analysis once this is seen as involving the meaningful understanding of specific cases and not the development of general concepts and general theories.
- g. Weber himself had argued that “ideal types were not models to be tested. However, other sociologists treat them as testable models of the real world. Further confusion may arise since Weber himself often implicitly used ideal types as testable models.

Finally, it can be said that if the above mentioned dangers and deficiencies are averted, the ideal type can become an extremely useful instrument to confront reality.

10.8 Summary

This unit began with a clarification of the general meaning of the terms ‘ideal’ and ‘type’. We discussed the concept and characteristics of ideal type as associated with Max Weber’s writings. Ideal types are those constructs or concepts which are formulated for interpretation and explanation of social reality. Weber used ideal types in three distinctive ways. First, he used ideal types of historical particulars to explain Protestant ethics that appeared only in specific historical periods and in particular cultural areas. Secondly he used ideal type to explain abstract elements of social reality, namely, bureaucracy, types of authority, social action and so on. His third kind of ideal type relates to the reconstruction of particular kind of behaviour. We examined in detail

the use of ideal type in Weber's work in this unit.

10.9 Self Assessment Questions

1. In what sense Weber used the concept of ideal type to show the relationship between Calvinist ethic and the spirit of capitalism?
2. What are the major characteristics of ideal type of bureaucracy as outlined by Max Weber?
3. What are the four ideal types of social actions stated by Max Weber. Answer in about five lines.

10.10 Key Words

Affective Action: It is that type of action, which is carried out under the sway of some sort of emotional state or condition.

Authority: It is that type of power whose exercise people see as legitimate.

Bureaucracy: A system of administration based on the division of labour, specialisation, hierarchy of officials, formal body of rules to govern, written documents, impersonal relations, recruitment and promotion on the basis of ability and separation of private and official income etc.

Calvinism: One of the four main streams of Protestantism besides Methodism, Pietism and Baptist. Calvinism has three major important tenants: that the universe is created to further the greater glory of God; that the motives of the almighty are beyond human comprehension; and that only a small number of people are chosen to achieve eternal grace i.e. the belief in predestination.

Capitalism: An economic organisation which consists of private ownership of property, control of capital, has market mechanism and provision of workers and which aims at making maximum profit.

Charismatic Authority: In this type of authority, commands are obeyed because followers believe in the extraordinary character of the leader.

Legal-Rational Authority: This involves obedience to formal rules established by regular public procedure.

Protestant Ethic: A doctrine of Christianity which provided much of the cultural content of

capitalism like individualism, achievement motivation, hostility to inherited wealth and luxury, emphasis on work and profit, opposition to magic and superstition and commitment to rational organisation.

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Unit-11 Theory of Social Action

Structure

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

11.3 Social Action

11.3.1 Meaning of social action

11.3.2 Meaning and orientation

11.3.3 Range of social action

11.3.4 Types of social action

11.3.4.1 Traditional action

11.3.4.2 Affectual (Emotional) action

11.3.4.3 Value rational action (wertrational)

11.3.4.4 Instrumental rational action (Zweckrational)

11.3.5 Critique of Weber's social action theory

11.4 Summary

11.5 Self Assessment Questions

11.6 Key Words

11.7 Study Guide

11.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify the important contributions of Max Weber to Sociology;
- define Social Action and its four Ideal types;
- explain subjective understanding of social actions and its importance in Sociology;
- discuss natural science and social science;
- explain the sociological methodology of Weber

11.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

A contemporary of Durkheim, Max Weber (1864-1920) was concerned with the development of that dimension which he thought most essential and promising for the furtherance of the science of Sociology. Karl Emil Maximilian Weber, popularly known as Max Weber, was born in Erfurt; Germany in 1864. He is regarded as one of the founding fathers of Sociology. Weber delineated the subject matter of Sociology as the “subjective understanding of social action”. Weber stated that the basic unit of society is social action, and social action is motivated by the purpose and will of the actors. In other words, the individuals attribute meanings to their actions, and interact with others in the society. The task of a researcher is to explore and analyse the meanings that the actors attribute to their actions. For this, Weber developed an elaborate methodology for the exploration and analysis of this subjective realm of social action. Weber’s contribution to sociological theory was complementary to the kind of analysis that Durkheim developed. In fact, Weber’s contribution was a filling in of that dimension which Durkheim left wholly untouched. In this Unit we will discuss the major contributions of Max Weber i.e. social action to Sociology.

11.3 Social Action

Weber’s theory of social action follows directly from his discussion of the problem of methods in the social sciences. He first developed a theory of social action in “Economy and Society” between 1911 and 1920. Weber is concerned with developing a theory of society that was consistent with making judgements about the decisions individuals make in their actions with others in a social environment. Weber stated that ‘sociology is a science concerning itself with

the interpretative understanding of human social action’.

Between 1903 and 1907, Weber wrote several essays on methodological issues in which he discussed problems related to founding a theory of social action. While the essays were originally written as critical reviews of the ongoing debate between the natural and social sciences on the question of method, they became a theoretical justification for the pursuit of a theory of meaningful social action. Weber argued that the objective sciences of the outer world of nature had failed to treat the problem of ‘human inner understanding’. He claimed that social sciences were concerned essentially with the ‘inner states’ of actors. The social sciences have as their object those things which in principle are different from the objects of the sciences like physics, chemistry and biology. Weber believed that what sets the subject matter of social science apart is that human beings have ‘inner states’ in terms of which they ‘understand’ the events of the outer world in which they come to act. Weber reasoned that human conduct is in principle distinct from physical events in the outer world because the physical behaviour of things in nature such as the action of the Earth around the sun does not involve understanding, and is thus devoid of it. Human individuals understand the action of others by interpreting them, and that they depend on this understanding in order to act. Their actions involve meaningful interpretations of the act of others they are responding to.

Society is the product of what is produced by human beings acting according to values and value ends. Thus whatever is produced in the society by human action is the result of values attaching to it. Every product of society- history, language, art, religion- embodies some value recognised by human actors as having value attached to it. As far as the objective sciences are concerned, whatever is a product of nature is without regard to values. In order to understand the meaning of a particular action we must understand the values of the actor and the other actor, which is only possible in social sciences.

11.3.1 Meaning of social action

According to Weber, any form of investigation which reduces human action to its simple external characteristics would be meaningless since it would not capture the tendency of human interpretative understanding. Human beings can only act in the world after having interpreted the act of others to whom they are responding. “Social Action ” takes place only ‘when the acting individual attaches a subjective ,meaning to the act and when the act takes

account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.’ From this, there appears to be three key aspects to defining a human action as social:

- Meaningful to the actor- Presumably things that are understandable or are of concern to the social actor, perhaps as a result of experiences, values and interests.
- Consider others- other social actors are necessarily involved in order for an individual action to become social action, and they must explicitly be considered by the social actor (whether positively, negatively or neutrally).
- Oriented- some direction or purpose in the action.

11.3.2 Meaning and orientation

This includes actions that are associated with ends that the actor wishes to pursue, actions or ends that have value of their own sake for the actor (spiritual, ethical, emotional), ‘feeling states’ associated with affectual and emotional activities and interests, traditional and habitual feelings, concerns and interests that may drive from experiences and socialisation. Some activities that Weber does not consider to be social action, like contemplation or spiritual activities, also having meaning for the individual but these either do not involved others or are not oriented.

Weber’s first reference to meaning notes that this is ‘actual meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor’ or alternatively, ‘to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors’. In the case of the individual, Weber notes how this means conduct that the actor subjectively orients to the behaviour of others. This includes some idea of subjective consciousness, awareness of others, attention to others, having some understanding how one’s actions respond to others, or are likely to affect others. It is also oriented in its course, implying that it has some purpose, aim or end, so that the actor presumably considered how it takes others into account.

11.3.3 Range of social action

Weber defines and analyses the range of social action and the categorization of such actions. One way that social action can be understood is by considering what is not social action. Among these actions are:

- **Reactive Behaviour-** Here there is no subjective meaning and generally ‘merely reactive imitation’ is not social.
- **Traditional behaviour** although this may cross the line between what is meaningful and not and “almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli”.
- **Psychological processes** may not be meaningful, at least not discernible by those other than a psychologist.
- **Mystical experiences** are not ordinarily social since they are entirely personal and “contemplation and solitary prayer”.
- **Psychic or psychophysical phenomena** such as “fatigue, habituation, memory ... states of euphoria” and variations in individual reaction times or precision.
- Non-social, **if overt action** directed toward inanimate objects. What about action directed toward non-human animals, e.g. walking a dog.
- **Natural actions** such as “a mere collision of two cyclists” although subsequent actions such as insult, blows, or friendly discussion are ordinarily social meaningful.
- **Common actions in a crowd, crowd psychology, mass action.** These might be socially meaningful in some circumstances but tend to be more habitual, impulsive (cheering or booing at a sporting event or clapping after a music performance, eg. after every solo in jazz), automatic, or reactive.
- **Imitation** may be meaningful or not, depending on its form and results. Weber argues that this is difficult to analyze – imitation may be merely reactive or it may be a learning process that has subjective meaning associated with this. The reactive learning of language by children is of this sort and it is difficult to determine the extent to which subjective meaning is involved.
- **“Purely affectual behavior”** is also on the borderline – affectual action is one form of social action but if the activity is merely reactive or habitual, it may not be so meaningful in each circumstance.

All of the above show the difficulty of defining social action since the dividing line between what is meaningful or considered differs by individual and situation. While Weber fairly clearly distinguishes between what is social action and what is not in analytical terms, any study of social action requires careful empirical study and sympathetic understanding by a sociologist.

Among the types of action that have meaning attached to them and result from conscious consideration, Weber notes the following:

- Orientation toward “ultimate ends or values”, determining the “ends of the participants and [obtaining] adequate knowledge of all the circumstances”, and “the various ways in which human action has been oriented to these facts”.
- “Oriented to the past, present, or expected future behavior of others”.
- May involve others who are “entirely unknown”.
- Use of money and economic exchange are socially meaningful in that they are considered, involve others (including future), and are oriented toward obtaining some end.

11.3.4 Types of social action

Weber argues that there are four major types of social action. These are ideal types in that each is analytically distinct from the other, are average forms of behaviour, are “conceptually pure”, and “sociologically important”. The four forms are:

11.3.4.1 Traditional Social Action

This is a form of social action in which the individual reacts ‘automatically’ to the problem in the outside world and to the external circumstances in a habitual manner. Traditional action is based on a habitual response to the world that guides the behavior of the actor in a course of action which has been repeatedly followed in the past. To act in this way, Weber argued, the actor need not imagine a goal, a picture an outcome or be conscious of a specific commitment to values or to value scales. According to Weber, the bulk of everyday action corresponds to this type. In traditional action, the ends and means are fixed by customs, there is no calculation in the attainment of ends, and there is little or judgement. Traditional action lacks a specific orientation to rationality, it lies closer to what Weber called the ‘borderline of what can be justifiably called meaningful oriented action’. A religious leader, for example, may exhibit traditional action by a devotion to routine or to ways of living in the world that are frozen in tradition.

Traditional action is distinguished from the other types of action by the absence of a subjective meaning that is attached by the actor to the situation, and from this perspective Weber believed

that traditional action forgoes a specific orientation to subjective meaning since the actor largely responds to situations based on a customary view of reality that is handed down from the past.

11.3.4.2 Affectual (Emotional) action

Action is emotional when it ‘satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification, devotion, contemplative bliss, or the working off of emotional tensions’. In this context, the actor is directly impelled to act on the basis of an emotional response to a situation or external circumstance that is determined by the state of mind of the actor. Like traditional action, emotional action lacks a specific orientation to goal or to a set of ultimate values since its means of expression is based on the emotional state of the actor in a given circumstance. Under these conditions, emotional action lacks a specific rational orientation to the world and forgoes means and ends calculation since it is governed by impulsive acts which often have no goal or aim. Like traditional action, emotional action is on the border line of what is considered to be meaningful action and, in this sense, it is irrational in that it forgoes inner evaluation and subjective meaning.

11.3.4.3 Value rational action (wertrational)

This is a type of action in which ultimate values act as a guide to action. While the first two types of action were characterized by the absence of a specific meaning that is subjectively assigned by the actor, value rational action exemplifies a rational orientation to the extent that a specific meaning is applied to the action by the actor. Weber describes value rational action as a straightforward orientation to absolute values and consideration of action based on a value orientation to the world. Under these circumstances the actor seeks to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required either by duty, honour, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call or the importance of some cause no matter in what it consists, regardless of possible cost to themselves.

In this case, the meaning of an action does not lie in the achievement of a result but rather lies in carrying out the realization of the specific value considerations for its own sake, and therefore the sole aim of value rational action is the realization of specific value and the obligation placed on the actor by the value in question. Here the efficacy of the means is not taken into account. The actor feels obligated to follow commands or demands which are binding on the actor’s

commitment to specific values. For instance, the Dalai Lama acts on the basis of promoting peace in the world because of the meaning that attaches to the value of promoting human life and his commitment to the pursuit of such values.

11.3.4.4 Instrumental rational action (Zweckrational)

This type of action differs from value rational by virtue of the fact that the ends, the means and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed for the explicit purpose of maximizing successful outcomes and controlling unforeseen circumstances in reality. Instrumental action utilizes strategies in relation to the world based on the most effective procedures for attaining desired ends. Actors may choose to treat ends as a given set of subjective wants and arrange them in a scale of urgency. To the extent that instrumental action orient itself to the rational achievement of ends, it may be without relation to values, and in this respect the actor may not be bound by specific values or value scales. The actor takes into account those conditions of knowledge calculated to produce the best possible outcomes.

11.3.5 Critique of Weber's Social Action Theory

1. It limits the study for sociologists. According to him, social is that which has meaning for individuals. Therefore, individual behavior activities, which lack meaning, are not a subject matter of sociology. Also such behavior should be oriented towards others. Therefore, solitary prayer is not a social action.
2. According to Weber, human beings are rational and conscious in interpreting the world. Thus, he excludes much action as irrational. These include impulsive acts and emotions like anger, pride, jealousy etc.
3. Weber's action theory studies only individual action. Group or collectivities are not his primary focus.
4. He mentions little about conflict. He does not consider disagreements and misunderstandings.
5. According to Weber, actions of individuals must be analysed to determine their consequences. That is causal approach. But there may be unintended consequences. Outcomes of social action cannot be predicted from meanings of action.

6. According to C.W Mills, Weber laid greater emphasis on mental processes but spent a little time on them.

11.4 Summary

Sociology is concerned with social actions, i.e. the actions that are directed at others. Social actions have to be understood with reference to its subjective meaning. It is subjective as it could be understood only from the viewpoint of the actor. Social actions are rational behaviour having an end and a means to achieve the end. There are four types of social actions based on the nature of the ends, and the means to achieve those ends. These are traditional, affectual, value-rational and rational-instrumental. Weber developed methodology to enable the researcher to interpret the subjective meaning of social actions and to arrive at valid generalizations of social actions.

11.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. What is social action?
2. What are the types of social action?
3. What in causal relation?

11.6 Key Words

Custom: The term refers to the established mode of behaviour, thought and action, which are practised from generation to generation. Violation of this mode of behaviour is socially not accepted because of societal constraints. Customary forces are sometimes more binding than the orders of the state.

Positivism (Positivist perspective or Positivist sociology): The scientific study of social patterns based on methodological principles of the natural sciences.

Rationalization: The general tendency of modern institutions and most areas of life to be transformed by the application of instrumental reason.

Social action: Actions to which individuals attach subjective meanings.

Verstehen: German for “understanding”; in sociology it refers to the use of empathy, or putting oneself in another’s place; to understand the motives and logic of another’s action.

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Block-04 Karl Marx

Unit-12 Dialectical Materialism

Unit-13 Capitalism

Unit-14 Alienation

Unit-15 Class and Class Struggle

Unit-12 Dialectical Materialism

Structure

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12.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- discuss the Marxian concepts of dialectics;
- describe the laws of dialectics;
- show the application of the laws of dialectics.
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12.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

This unit primarily deals with the central ideas of Karl Marx. He is critically acclaimed to be a conflict theorist and by reading his theories we would come to know how conflicting elements inherent in a society bring change. Karl Marx envisages history as a class struggle with material production at the centre. His historical interpretation of history is based on the various materials, economic and social conditions that men initiated and indulged themselves in. He took the various eras of development in European history and attributed them to all developing societies that have emerged in the world. Karl Marx divides these different eras of development into phases or societies. He divides the first phase into three different societies. These are the primitive communist society, slave society and the feudal society. The second phase takes on the capitalist society alone and in the future phase he brings in socialism and communism. In this chapter, we shall consider Karl Marx's interpretation of history as strife between opposing forces, which for him was at its peak in the capitalist society. For him it is this strife that takes history from one stage of development to another with production at the center. However Marx was greatly influenced by the philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach.

12.3 Early Life and Works

Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818 in Trier, a small city situated in the southern part of the German Rhineland. He grew up in a middle class Jewish household, which had converted to Protestantism to escape the social difficulty suffered by Jews in German society. Marx's father played an important role in his life and acted both as a friend and as an advisor. In 1835, at the age of 17, Marx entered the University of Bonn as a law student and shortly thereafter left Bonn for the University of Berlin. It was in Berlin that Marx first read the works of George Hegel whose theoretical writings influenced him throughout his life.

In April of 1841, Marx received his doctorate and published his first work in 1842 in a popular journal called *Deutsche Jahrbucher*. In 1843 Marx moved to Cologne where he studied the works of Ludwig Feuerbach, and during this period his writings were shaped by his criticism of Hegel and Hegel's dominance in German philosophy. In the same year, Marx produced two major writings related to the criticism of Hegel's conception of the state, entitled *A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On the Jewish Question*. Immediately following these critiques, he began to develop an outline of a theory of history and economic life, which later became one of his most important theoretical contributions.

By May of 1844, Marx drafted some notes related to classical economics and alienated labour entitled *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, which became one of his most famous writings. Later, this led him to the formal study of political economy and economic history. Marx became more involved in economic questions and this began an open criticism of society and eventually a more intense focus on economic problems. In 1845, in collaboration with Engels, published a work entitled *The Holy Family* attacking the Young Hegelians for their philosophic view of society and history. Later, they collaborated a work entitled *The German Ideology* which laid out the conditions for the break with German philosophy and outlined what later became the materialist theory of history, one of Marx's important contributions.

In 1848, Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, which had an enormous impact on the workers' movement throughout Europe. Marx formed his lifelong interest in the social conditions of the industrial worker, and by 1859 he had sketched an outline of a work called *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. Over the next ten years, Marx devoted himself to writing and preparing his most famous work entitled *Capital*, which was published in 1867. In the following years, Marx wrote two more volumes of *Capital* and, eighteen years later, he died in London at the age of 65 in 1883.

12.4 Dialectical Materialism

Philosophy is divided into two camps- idealists and materialists. Many great thinkers of the past were idealists, notably Plato and Hegel. This school of thought looks upon nature and history as a reflection of ideas or spirit. The theory that men and women and every material thing were created by a divine spirit is a basic concept of idealism. These philosophers believe that ideas govern the development of the material world. History is explained as a history of

thought. People's actions are seen as resulting from abstract thoughts, and not from their material needs. Hegel went one step further, being a consistent idealist, and turned thoughts into an independent "Idea" existing outside of the brain and independent of the material world. The later was merely a reflection of this idea.

The Materialist thinkers on the other hand, have maintained that the material world is real and that nature or matter is primary. The mind or ideas are a product of the brain. The brain, and therefore ideas, arose at a certain stage in the development of living matter. The basic corner-stones of Materialism are as follows:

- a. The material world, known to us by our senses and explored by science, is real. The development of the world is due to its own natural laws, without any recourse to the supernatural.
- b. There is only one world, the material one. Thought is a product of matter (the brain) without which there can be no separate ideas. Therefore minds or ideas cannot exist in isolation apart from matter. General ideas are only reflections of the material world. "To me," wrote Marx, "the idea is nothing else than the material world reflected in the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." And further, "Social being determines consciousness".

The Idealists conceive of consciousness, of thought, as something external, and opposed to matter, to nature. This opposition is something entirely false and artificial. There is a close correlation between the laws of thought and the laws of nature, because the former follow and reflect the latter. Thought cannot derive its categories from itself, but only from the external world. Even the most seemingly abstract thoughts are in fact derived from the observation of the material world. Even an apparently abstract science like pure mathematics has, in the last analysis, been derived from material reality, and is not spun from the brain.

According to Lenin, "this is materialism: matter acting on our sense organs produces sensation. Sensations depend upon the brain, nerves, retina, etc., i.e., matter is primary. Sensation, thought, consciousness are the supreme product of matter". People are a part of nature, who develops their ideas in interaction with the rest of the world. Mental processes are real enough, but they are not something absolute, outside nature. They should be studied in their material and social circumstances in which they arise. According to Marx, "morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no

longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development, but men, developing their material intercourses, alter along with this their real existence their thinking and the product of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.”

12.4.1 The origins of materialism

According to Engels, seventeenth century onwards, England is home to modern capitalism. At this time, the old feudal aristocracy and monarchy were being challenged by the newly emerged middle classes. The rising bourgeoisie challenged the old ideas and divine concepts that the old order was based upon. Parallel with the rise of the middle classes went on the great revival of science; astronomy, mechanics, physics, anatomy and physiology. And the bourgeoisie for the development of its industrial production required a science which ascertained the physical properties of natural objects and the modes of action of the forces of Nature. Until then, science was under the control of the church.

It was at this time that Francis Bacon (1561-1626) developed his revolutionary ideas of materialism. According to him the senses were infallible and the source of all knowledge. All science was based upon experience, and consisted in subjecting the data to a rational method of investigation; induction, analysis, comparison, observation and experiment. It was, however, left to Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) to continue and develop Bacon’s materialism into a system. He realized that ideas and concepts were only a reflection of the material world, and that “it is impossible to separate thought from matter that thinks”. Later, the English thinker John Locke (1632-1704) provided proof of this materialism.

The materialist school of philosophy passed from England to France, to be taken up and developed further by Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and his followers. These French materialists did not limit themselves to criticisms of religion, but extended them to all institutions and ideas.

The defect, however, of this materialism from Bacon onwards was its rigid, mechanical interpretation of Nature. The English school of materialist philosophy flourished in the 18th century, when the discoveries of Isaac Newton made “mechanics” the most advanced and important science. A criticism was made of the mechanical approach of the materialists. A German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), made the first breakthrough in the old mechanistic ways with his discovery that the Earth and the solar system had come into being,

and had not existed eternally. The same also applies to geography, geology, plants and animals. This revolutionary idea of Kant was comprehensively developed by another brilliant German thinker, George Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel was a philosophical idealist, believing that the world could be explained as a manifestation or reflection of a “Universal Mind” or “Idea”, i.e., some form of God.

Hegel looked upon the world not as an active participant in society and human history, but as a philosopher, contemplating events from afar. He set himself up as a measuring rod of the world, interpreting history according to his prejudices as the history of thought, the world as the world of ideas, an Ideal World. Thus for Hegel, problems and contradictions were posed not in real terms but in terms of thought, and could therefore find their solution only in terms of thought. Instead of contradictions in society being solved by the actions of men and women, by the class struggle, they instead find their solution in the philosopher’s head, in the Absolute Idea.

Hegel recognized the errors and shortcomings of the old mechanistic outlook. He also pointed out the inadequacies of formal logic and set about the creation of a new world outlook which could explain the contradictions of change and movement.

Although Hegel rediscovered and analyzed the laws of motion and change, his idealism placed everything on its head. It was the struggle and criticism of the Young Hegelians, led by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), which tried to correct and place philosophy back on its feet. Yet even Feuerbach was not able to fully purge Hegelianism of its idealist outlook. This work was left to Marx and Engels, who were able to rescue the dialectical method from its mystical shell. Hegelian dialectics were fused with modern materialism to produce the revolutionary understanding of dialectical materialism.

12.4.2 The dialectics

According to Engels, “Dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought.” The dialectical method of thinking already had a long existence before Marx and Engels developed it scientifically as a means of understanding the evolution of human society. The ancient Greeks produced some great dialectical thinkers, including Plato, Zenon and Aristotle. As early as 500 B.C., Heraclitus advanced the idea that “everything is and is not, for everything is in flux, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away”. And further, “all things flow, all change. It is

impossible to enter twice into one and the same stream”. This statement already contains the fundamental conception of dialectics that everything in nature is in a constant state of change, and that this change unfolds through a series of contradictions. According to Engels, “For dialectical philosophy nothing is final, absolute, and sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything: nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain.

The dialectic may be provisionally defined as theory of opposites. Dialectical materialism maintains that source of development of nature and society is ingrained within it and the force that helps in the process of development is never an extraneous factor but very much indigenous in character. The source of change tends to be internal contradiction or struggle between opposites which generates force and attributes for social development.

12.4.3 Hegel’s dialectics

The old dialectical method of reasoning, which had fallen into disuse from medieval times on, was revived in the early 19th century by the great German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, (1770-1831). Hegel produced the first really comprehensive analysis of the laws of dialectics, which served as a basis upon which Marx and Engels later developed their theory of dialectical materialism.

Hegel combined the two strands of dialectic, i.e., the idea of dialectic as reason and as process. In broad sense, he used the notion of dialectics as a logical process and more narrowly he traced it as the generator or motor of the logical process. Hegel maintained that God or the Absolute comes to self-knowledge through human knowledge. In other words, the categories of human thought are equal to objective forms of being and logic is at the same time the theory about the nature of being. Further, Hegel proposed that dialectics can be conceived more narrowly as grasping of opposites in their unity. Hegel saw it as a process which brings out what is implicit. In this way, each development is a product of a previous less developed phase. In a way new development is a fulfilment of the previous state. Thus there is always a hidden tension between a form and its process of becoming a new form. Hegel interpreted history as progress in the consciousness of freedom.

Marx was initially influenced by Hegel's philosophy but later on he criticised it due to its idealist nature and propounded his own dialectical materialism. Marx criticised Hegel for deducing the laws of dialectics from consciousness instead of material existence. On this point Marx said that to get a scientifically sound dialectical method one will have to totally invert the logic of Hegelian dialectics. This is what Marx did in his dialectical materialism, where in contradistinction to Hegel, he said it is the matter which is supreme and determinant of consciousness and idea and not vice-versa.

In providing his ideas on dialectical theory, Marx was sometimes adored and sometimes condemned to have turned Hegel upside down. Hegel's dialectic is labelled as dialectic idealism while Marx' dialectic was tagged as dialectical materialism.

12.4.4 The law of dialectics

Dialectical materialism, evolved by Marx, is diametrically opposite to Hegelian dialectics. It seeks to explain everything in terms of contradictions of matter. Dialectical materialism provides abstract laws for natural and social change. Contrary to metaphysics, it believes that in Nature, things are interconnected, interrelated and determined by each other. It considers Nature as an integral whole. Dialectical materialism declares that the law of reality is the law of change. There is constant transformation in inorganic nature and human world. There is nothing eternally static. These transformations are not gradual but there is a violent, revolutionary shift. Some of the postulates of dialectical materialism are-

- a. All phenomena of nature are parts of integrated whole.
- b. Nature is in a state of continuous movement and change.
- c. The development process is product of quantitative achievement which stimulates abrupt changes in the society.
- d. Inherent elements of human society are so well integrated that changes in one brings effect in others.

Marx's dialectical materialism, thus, holds that history is the series of stages based on particular modes of production and characterised by particular type of economic organisation. Because of inherent contradiction, each stage contains within itself the causes of its own destruction. Marx says that in the society economic organisations are determined by modes of production giving

birth to relation of production and dialectical stage being the opposite of each other in course of time produces three stages namely:

- e. Thesis
- f. Antithesis
- g. Synthesis

The first stage (thesis) cannot continue for a very long time. It is bound to be opposed by its antithesis and the interaction between thesis and antithesis gives birth to third stage (synthesis). It again provides a platform for thesis. To Marx, material world is very much governed by this rule. The dialectical theory, provided by Marx, is governed by certain universal determinism of the society which themselves are governed by certain laws discussed below:-

12.4.4.1 The law of unity of opposites

The law of unity of opposites forms the core of dialectics. This law reveals the sources, the real causes of the eternal motion and development of the material world. It states that there are internal sides, tendencies, forces of an object or phenomena, which are mutually exclusive but at the same time presuppose each other. The inseparable interconnections of these opposite tendencies or contradictions are responsible for the unity of opposites. This contradictoriness of objects and phenomena of the world is of a general, universal nature. There is no object or phenomenon in the world which could not be divided into opposites. These opposites coexist and one is inconceivable without the other. However, these opposites cannot coexist peacefully in one object: the contradictory, mutually exclusive character of opposites necessarily causes a struggle between them. The old and the new, the emergent and the obsolete must come into conflict. Here it is important to note that the unity of opposites is a necessary condition of the conflict, because it takes place only where opposite sides exist in one object or phenomenon. It is the contradiction, the conflict of opposites that is the main source of development of matter and consciousness. Development is the struggle of these opposites. Here, more often than not one opposite or tendency of the two tries to maintain the status quo and the other counterpart tries to radically change the status quo. This conflict leads to a new situation, object, phenomenon or stage or development, when the mature conditions come into existence after several quantitative changes. This radical change is the qualitative change. This is how one can find the logical

interconnections between these three laws of dialectical materialism.

Each movement takes its source from internal contradictions, so that the emergence of new contradictions gives rise to a new form of movement, while their disappearance gives place to another form of movement for which other contradictions are responsible. The opposites can never become balanced completely. The unity, the equal effect of opposites, is temporary and relative, whereas their conflict is eternal.

12.4.4.2 The law of negation of negations

The term ‘negation’ was introduced in philosophy by Hegel but with an idealist meaning. Hegel believed that the negation was present in the development of the idea, of thought. Marx criticised Hegel and gave a materialistic interpretation of negation. He showed that negation is an integral part of development of reality itself. Marx wrote, “In no sphere can one undergo a development without negating one’s previous mode of existence.”

For example, the development of the earth’s crust has undergone a number of geological eras, each new era, arising on the basis of the preceding one, represents a certain negation of the old. In animal world also, each new species of animal, arising on the basis of the old, at the same time represents its negation. The history of society also consists of a chain of negations of the old social order by the new: as Raymond Aron (1965) puts it, capitalism is the negation of feudal society, and socialism would be the negation of capitalism i.e. negation of negation. In the realm of knowledge and science also, each new scientific theory negates the old theories, for example, Bohn’s theory of atom negated Dalton’s molecular theory or Darwin’s theory negated earlier speculations about human evolution.

Negation is not something introduced into an object or phenomenon from outside, but is the result of the object’s or phenomenon’s own, internal development. Objects and phenomena develop on the basis of their own inherent, internal contradictions: they themselves create the conditions for their destruction, for the change into a new, higher quality. Negation is the overcoming of the old through internal contradictions, a result of selfdevelopment, self movement of objects and phenomena. Thus, socialism comes to take the place of capitalism because it resolves the internal contradictions of the capitalist system.

Dialectical negation, therefore, consists of the fact that something of a stage which is negated is lost, something becomes part of the new, negating stages (although in a modified form), and

something entirely new is added. Thus, recognition of continuity, the connection of the new and the old in development is a feature of the Marxist understanding of negation. But we must bear in mind that the new never takes over the old completely, as it is. It takes from the old only certain elements or aspects. This too, it does not absorb mechanically, but assimilates and transforms them in conformity with its own nature.

For example, after throwing off the colonial yoke, in India we started building a new nation. In this process, we tried to do away with all the vestiges of oppression and the institutions that blocked national development. However, we did retain the educational, legal and bureaucratic structures along with the modern infrastructure of transportation and telecommunication.

Due to these reasons, the succession of developmental stages is progressive. Although no stage is ever completely repeated, some features of earlier stages necessarily recur, although in a different form, at later stages. In this way, the old is destroyed and the new arises. This is only one of the stages of development, not to end, because development does not stop here. Anything new does not remain new forever. While developing, it prepares the prerequisites for the rise of something newer and more progressive. When these prerequisites and conditions ripen, negation again occurs. This is a negation of the negation, that is the negation of that which itself previously overcame the old: this is replacement of the new by something newer. The result of this second negation is again negated, overcome, and so on till infinity. Development thus appears as a countless number of successive negations, as an endless replacement or overcoming of old by the new.

12.4.4.3 The law of transition from quantity to quality

In nature, everything is in a state of continuous movement and change. Certain things are arising or coming into existence whereas certain things are developing, and/or decaying and certain things are dying or going out of existence at a given time. This means a state of continuous flux. As said earlier, Marx believed that law of reality is the law of change. Now the question arises regarding the nature of change. What kind of change is this? This law responds to this particular question. According to this law, process of change is not simple or gradual but it is a product of quantitative advances which result in abstract qualitative changes at a particular moment when mature conditions are present. There is never repetition of occurrences. This change is always from lower to higher, simpler to complex, homogeneous to heterogeneous levels of reality.

The appearance or the birth of the new and the death or disappearance of the old can be considered as qualitative changes, philosophically as well as logically. Whereas all other changes, whereby different parts or aspects of an object become rearranged increase or diminish (while the object retains its identity), could be considered as quantitative changes. Hence the dialectical level or law of transition from quantity to quality and vice-versa is that continuous quantitative changes, upon attaining measure, cause abrupt qualitative changes, which in their turn determine the character of the further continuous quantitative changes. To explain and simplify it further, one could say that the qualitative changes may be of two forms: (i) something did not exist, but now it does, and (ii) something existed but now it does not. Quantitative changes, on the other hand, are infinitely diverse, e.g., larger-smaller, more/ less, more often more seldom, faster-slower, warmer-colder, lighter-heavier, worse-better, poorer-riches, and so on.

In fact these quantitative changes occur continuously in every object of Nature and they reach to a limit determined by the nature of each process, after which a leap inevitably occurs. The limit beyond which continuous change is interrupted is described as measure philosophy. This leap is the qualitative change. To give a concrete example, Indian national movement for freedom was continuing for more than a century leading to continuous quantitative changes and when it reached its limit there was a leap at the midnight stroke of the clock on 15th August 1947. India was a free country. Independence from colonialism was the qualitative change. Similarly, the process of ageing in human being does not stop even for a fraction of a second. We keep getting older or in other words we keep undergoing quantitative changes and when we reach the limit prescribed by nature, we meet the qualitative change i.e. death. This example could also be applied to birth of an infant. Quantitative changes keep going on during gestation period right from the day of conception but the qualitative change occurs when the baby breaths air in this world i.e. when it is born.

Hence the dialectical level or law of transition from quantity to quality and vice-versa is that continuous quantitative changes, upon attaining measure, cause abrupt qualitative changes, which in their turn determine the character of the further continuous quantitative changes.

12.4.5 Application of the laws of dialectical materialism

Karl Marx's materialist theory explains the development of human society through a series of

economic stages in which individuals are compelled to produce in order to survive and the society is divided into a system of unequal social classes and unequal productive relations. After laying out the basic framework for the materialist theory of history, Marx turned his attention to obtain evidence that would confirm his thesis that the historical development of society tends to be economic in nature. To do this, Marx conceived of history in the form of different types of ownership over the means of production which he thought could be expressed in terms of four separate stages or epochs of social and historical development: primitive, ancient, feudal and capitalist. Each of the stages of historical development had three basic characteristics- a system of production and division of labour, different forms of property ownership, and a system of class relations that emerge from the ownership over the means of production, giving rise to the productive relations.

12.4.5.1 Primitive society

This was the first, the simplest and the lowest form of mode of production. During the period of this form of mode of production, appearance of improved and also new implements, such as bows and arrows and learning to make a fire were examples of quantitative changes in terms of the laws of dialectical materialism. Even beginning of cultivation and herding were examples of similar type of changes. The extremely low level relations of production were based on cooperation and mutual help due to common, communal ownership of means of production. These relations were conditioned by the fact that people with their primitive tools could only collectively withstand the mighty forces of nature.

Even in primitive society the productive forces developed steadily. The tools were improved and skills were gradually accumulated. The most significant development was the transition to metal tools. With the growth of productivity the communal structure of society started breaking into families. Private property arose and the family started becoming the owner of the means of production. Here the contradiction between the communal relations of production and the potential forms of exploiting classes led to the qualitative change i.e. transition into ancient mode of production. There was conflict of opposites within the system which led to the negation of primitive-communal system. Consequently, a new stage of slavery appeared. The slavery system can be described as the negation of primitive communal system.

12.4.5.2 Ancient society

In this form of society the primitive equality gave way to social inequality and emergence of slave-owning classes and slaves. The forces of production underwent further quantitative changes. In the slave-owning society, the relations of production were based on the slaveowner's absolute ownership of both the means of production and the slaves themselves and their produce. In this society, there existed the contradictions between slave-owners and slaves. When the mature conditions were reached the struggle of these contradictions led to the qualitative change i.e. the negation of slave-owning society by way of its transition into feudal society. The conflict of the opposites i.e. the slave-owners and slave culminated into violent slave revolts ultimately effecting the negation. We can say that the feudal system stands as an example of negation of negation. It means that feudal society can be seen as an example of negation of slave-owning society which itself is a negation of primitivecommunal society.

12.4.5.3 Feudal society

Slavery system was the first stage where relations of production were based on domination and exploitation by the slave-owner class of the slave class. This was the stage, where the relations of production saw qualitatively fundamental differences compared to previous stage. In feudal stage, the forces of production saw rapid quantitative change where for the first time inanimate sources of energy such as water and wind were tapped. The development of these productive forces was facilitated by the feudal relations of production. The feudal lords oppressed and exploited their serfs. However, towns began to emerge at this time. Trade, commerce and manufacture began to flourish. Many serfs ran away from the feudal estates to pursue a trade in the growing towns. The conflict of opposites within the feudal system namely, that of landless serfs against feudal lords, reached its maturity. The feudal system declined and its negation was the capitalist system.

12.4.5.4 Capitalist society

Based on private capitalist ownership, the capitalist relations of production facilitated tremendous growth of the productive forces. With this growth of productive forces, capitalist relations of production ceased to correspond to forces of production in feudal system. The most

significant contradiction of the capitalist mode of production is the contradiction between the social character of production and the private capitalist form of appropriation. Production in capitalist society bears a strikingly pronounced social character. Many millions of workers are concentrated at large plants and take part in social production, while the fruits of their labour are appropriated by a small group of owners of the means of production. This is the basic economic contradiction of capitalism. This contradiction or conflict of opposites gives rise to economic crisis and unemployment, causes fierce class battles between the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class), in other words, quantitative changes. The working class would help bring about a socialist revolution. This revolution would, according to Marx abolish the capitalist production relations and usher in the new qualitative change i.e. the communist socio-economic formation.

The new communist socio-economic formation, as we have seen earlier, passes in its development through two phases, socialism and communism. Socialism does away with private ownership of the means of production. It establishes public ownership of means of production. In such a society the proletariat will jointly own means of production and distribute the produce according to the needs of people. This is the stage of dictatorship of proletariat, which will later on also do away with the state apparatus leading to a stateless society. This stage of the stateless society will be possible in communism, where the dialectic finally unfolds itself, ushering in a social system which would be free of any contradictions within classes. According to the laws of dialectics contradictions will remain as this is the basis of development. Under communism there will be contradiction between Human Being and Nature, as in Primitive-Communism. The basic difference now is that the level of technology will be higher and Nature will be exploited more efficiently.

12.4.6 Marx's proposition

The dialectical materialism of Marx can be better understood when the conclusions are associated with it by the post-Marxian thinkers. The assumption is that Marxian thinkers insist upon the point that a phenomenon does not exist in isolation but depends upon other surrounding phenomena. To reveal the true nature of any phenomena, we must study the peripheral phenomena which exert their influence on all the phenomena under study because Marx insisted upon the material world. It became a necessity for the post- Marxian thinkers not to study the

phenomena with isolation but with the integration of object. Even Marx himself insisted on economic organisation, yet tried to create a networking of this economic organisation with other set up either political, legal or religious institution that contribute for the functioning of society.

Secondly, a phenomenon must be studied, according to Marx, in its dynamic state i.e. in the process of its movement and development. The tradition of movement and development cannot be claimed as an original contribution of Marx because it was very much reflected in the writings of Comte, Durkheim and Weber. To Marx, every society is in a state of continuous flux and the flux affects all the component elements which undergoes change and should be studied in dynamic aspect but not the static state.

Thirdly, when any contradictory elements are marked in the social system, one has to look into its inter-connection with other phenomena. The question of contradiction does not arise when the phenomena is isolated and segregated. The contradiction arises when a particular matter reaches to its stages of development and gives way to a different stage i.e. the original stage along with the existing one to find out the difference in its development.

12.4.7 Critical Remarks

Irrespective of its optimistic stand, the dialectical materialism of Marx is not free from criticism. Though out and out it was supported by post-Marxist scholars, the anti-Marxists and non-Marxists found the inherent difficulties associated in the theory.

- a. The theory of dialectical materialism was never the original contribution of Marx. People like Heraclitus long gave back the idea that the society is an on-going process with flock of events. Whereas the post-Marxist scholars glorified it as the original contribution of Marx.
- b. The non-Marxists viewed the theory of dialectical materialism as more and more temporary because development cannot be smooth as predicted by Marx. In many instances, development becomes sporadic and retarded. Secondly, Marx talked about only the indigenous factors of development, but development is also affected by extraneous factors. Thirdly, Marx talks of matter as a mechanism of change. But matter itself cannot change without being coupled with individual effort.
- c. Quantitative and qualitative change suggested by Marx from economic perspective has also been challenged. It cannot be suggested that there can be a balance between quality

and quantity. When quantity increases, obviously quality decreases. Superior quality is possible when quantity is less.

- d. All societies moves through dialectic phase, as suggested by Marx, but the archaic societies did not have witnessed such dialectical development such as India, which moved from feudalism to socialism directly.
- e. Marx suggested, development occurs due to inner contradictions and spontaneously. But without the interventions of individuals, institutional development cannot take place in the society. It is the political organisation that stimulates development and determines its course of action and, therefore, Marx seems to remain mum about the particular subject.

12.5 Summary

In this Unit on Marx, we studied Marx's most philosophically profound theory dialectic materialism. The unit is introduced with the concept of dialectics with a few definitions by various scholars. This is followed by a discussion of the application of the laws of dialectical materialism in the successive modes of production and consequent social change in society. In this unit, we have therefore studied these successive forms of mode of production in the context of dialectical principles of Karl Marx.

12.6 Self Assessment Questions

1. Write **the** name of the four modes of production.
2. Write the name of the stage marked by classless society and mentions its main characteristics.
3. Which stage follows socialism and what is its characteristic feature?

12.7 Key Words

Dialectics: The conflict between two mutually opposite forces or tendencies.

Dialectical Materialism: It is the Marxian theory that seeks to explain everything in terms of change which is caused due to constant contradiction of mutually opposite forces found in matter.

Quantitative Change: All the changes, whereby different parts or aspects of an object become

rearranged, increase or decrease while the object undergoing change retains its identity.

Qualitative: Appearance of new or disappearance of old is a qualitative change.

Negation: A new stage which is a product of a qualitative change and it is a progressive change to replace the old.

Negation of Negation: When something that came into existence as negation of the old, is in turn replaced by the new. It is a qualitative change.

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Unit-13 Capitalism

Structure

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13.1 Learning Objectives

After studying this Unit, the learner will be able to:

- Define capitalism and its features;
- Outline the contribution of Marx in defining capitalism;
- Define commodity production and its types.
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13.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

In this Unit, we deal with capitalism and how capitalism flourished with Industrial Revolution. It also throws light on Marxian analysis of capitalism and discusses the characteristics of capitalism. Finally, it also explains about production and mode of production as simple exchange system in human history. It discusses four types of mode of production.

13.3 Capitalism

Marx wrote the first volume of Capital between 1855 and 1866 and published it in 1867. 'Capital' is a scholarly work grounded in the history of the nineteenth century. It gives a clear picture of the development of industrial capitalism in England in 19th century.

Capitalism is generally considered by scholars to be an economic system that includes private ownership of the means of production, creation of goods or services for profit or income, the accumulation of capital, competitive markets, voluntary exchange, and wage labour. The designation is applied to a variety of historical cases, which vary in time, geography, politics, and culture.

Economists, political economists and historians have taken different perspectives on the analysis of capitalism. Economists usually focus on the degree that government does not have control over markets (laissez-faire economics), and on property rights. Most political economists emphasize private property, power relations, wage labour, class and capitalism's as a unique historical formation. Capitalism is generally viewed as encouraging economic growth. The differing extents to which different markets are free, as well as the rules defining private property, are a matter of politics and policy, and many states have what are termed mixed economies. A number of political ideologies have emerged in support of various types of capitalism, the most prominent being economic liberalism.

The relationship between the state, its formal mechanisms, and capitalist societies has been debated in many fields of social and political theory, with active discussion since the 19th century. Hernando de Soto is a contemporary economist who has argued that an important characteristic of capitalism is the functioning state protection of property rights in a formal property system where ownership and transactions are clearly recorded.

The relationship between democracy and capitalism is a contentious area in theory and popular political movements. The extension of universal adult male suffrage in 19th century Britain occurred along with the development of industrial capitalism, and democracy became widespread at the same time as capitalism, leading many theorists to posit a causal relationship between them—claiming each affects the other. However, in the 20th century, capitalism also accompanied a variety of political formations quite distinct from liberal democracies, including fascist regimes, absolute monarchies, and single-party states.

13.4 Defining Capitalism

Capitalism can be defined as a name for a type of economy which emerged during the period of social and industrial development in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It employs industry, commerce, labour and capital to produce commodities for purposes of consumption, the creation of wealth and the advancement of society. Its main aim is to employ workers for purposes of earning their livelihood and for creating wealth and prosperity in society. Capitalist economies emerged in the West from the ruins of feudal society whose economies were agrarian, and where agricultural production was a dominant way of life. Essential to the development of capitalism, therefore, is the transition from feudal to industrial society that began with the growing conflict between the rural economy of the countryside and the economy of the city leading to a separation between production and commerce. With the creation of private property, serfs and agricultural workers became detached from the land as a means of economic livelihood. As land began to be enclosed and the seizure of property became commonplace, serf labour were unable to meet their basic economic needs and were placed at the disposal of the new forces of production, making them a detached landless class who began to move to the emerging industrial centers to sell their labour in search of a livelihood. By this time, town economies had become dominant over the rural economies. In the light of these historical conditions, Marx defined capitalism as a system of social relations set in motion historically during the transition from feudal economies to the

economies of industry.

13.5 Conditions for the growth of capitalism

While the political economists of the eighteenth century defined capitalism as a market system utilizing land, labour and capital to produce wealth, Marx believed that neither money nor labour or commodities alone were sufficient to define capitalism. Instead, he took the view that for a society to be capitalistic, money and commodities had to be transformed into a system of social relations which he thought could take place only when the following four historical conditions were met.

The first condition that needs to be met, according to Marx, is the forcible separation of the serf labourer from the means of production where they once earned their livelihoods in feudal agriculture. This process largely took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the class contentions of feudal society made capitalist production possible by expelling the worker from the land and by divorcing the worker from the ownership of the means of production. This led to the detached labourer who had nothing to sell but their own labour. As feudal land fell into private hands and was transformed into private property, a labouring class appears who bear all the burdens of society without enjoying any advantage. As the separation of the worker from the means of production became more complete, it became a formal expression of the industrial mode of production itself.

The second condition in capitalist development is that one part of the society owns the means of production. The process of division of labour divided the society into two unequal classes who then entered into the production process. As the means of production fell into private hands, the working class lost all the freedom and autonomy to employ the means of production. The means of production became the private property of a dominant class.

The third condition is the emergence of a system of exchange governing the buying and selling of commodities. A system of exchange refers to a process where commodities are exchanged for a money price. Marx observed that as soon as system of exchange emerged, there was a formal separation between production and commerce and between production and consumption.

Fourth, Marx identified the advent of capitalism with a process he called ‘primitive accumulation’. This a process in which feudal land was coercively transformed into private property in which the agricultural labourer was coercively divorced from the means of production by the outright appropriation of land based on parliamentary approval.

13.6 Concept of commodity

According to Marx, commodity is a thing whose qualities are capable of satisfying human needs. Examples of commodities are bread, shoes, clothing, gasoline etc. In addition to this, he said, a commodity can be looked at from two very different points of view: its use value and its exchange value.

13.6.1 Use value of a commodity

The value of a commodity may be defined as the particular quality of a commodity has to satisfy human material needs. The use value of a commodity, therefore, has several characteristics.

- a. It refers to the specific social functions a commodity performs in meeting human needs, and so, understood in this sense, use value is the ability of a commodity to render a particular service to an individual. For example, a coat provides warmth, bread diminishes hunger and gasoline facilitates transportation.
- b. A commodity has the ability to satisfy only one particular human need or function. For instance, the ability of a coat to render warmth cannot be rendered by another commodity such as bread or coal. The use value of a commodity fills only one particular need, a need which is not transferable to another commodity.
- c. A commodity serves directly as a means of existence, as something that sustains life.

Having defined use value as the particular quality a commodity has to satisfy a human need and to render a service to an individual, it becomes possible to describe feudal economies as societies where use value was largely predominant, and where use value was the major form of value. In feudal societies, everything that was produced was consumed directly, there was no distinction between production and consumption, and whatever was produced did not enter into the medium of exchange to sustain life. In a feudal economy, there was no buying and selling, no markets and no system of exchange. Since production in feudal economies was always predominantly for use, the prevailing form of value was therefore use value, or value in use.

13.6.2 Exchange value of a commodity

Exchange value only arises in developed economies, and therefore is found only in capitalism.

One of the key characteristic of capitalism is that commodities are bought and sold and thus enter into a medium of exchange. It is, therefore, important to note that the system of exchange is historical and does not develop until capitalist society.

Exchange value refers to the ability of specific quantity of another commodity, such as one ton of rice, to be expressed in the value of a specific quantity of another commodity, say a quarter ton of coffee. Here, the value of a quarter ton of coffee is equivalent to the value of a quarter ton of rice. Exchange value, then, is not one commodity exchanging for neither another, nor one commodity being traded for other, but it is rather quantities of another commodity being expressed in terms of the value of quantities of another commodity, any commodity. In exchange, therefore, value comes to consist in the exchange relation between one commodity and another, as opposed to use value where the value consists in the human service rendered by the commodity.

Marx argued that when exchange value becomes dominant two things happen: first, all social relations between persons take the form of economic transactions in which their social relations are reduced to the utility of exchange alone. Second, Marx thought that when exchange value becomes the only determinant of value and comes to shape all social relations. Problems arise when human beings are considered to be 'valuable' only when they can sell their labour in exchange for a wage, and 'valueless' when they are unable to enter into the medium of exchange and sell their labour on the market for a wage. This is only possible in a society where all value is determined by the ability of things to enter into circulation with other articles of value. Marx believed that this was a major reversal of earlier systems of social relations in which human beings were valuable in themselves independent of the value conferred by the medium of exchange.

13.7 Labour Theory of Value

Marx now turns his attention to the question of what makes a commodity valuable and this takes us directly into the labour theory of value. Prior to Marx's analysis, Adam Smith and David Ricardo had explained the labour theory of value and the theory essentially holds that the value of a commodity is created by labour and that value inheres in a commodity as a thing or substance by virtue of the labour applied to it. However, Marx took two additional steps beyond their work: first, he disagreed with the claim that labour only imparts exchange value to the

commodity and that classical political economy had completely overlooked the question of how 'value is transformed into exchange value'. Second, he rejected the view that only one kind of labour is embodied in the commodity and insisted that there are two elements as the 'dual character' and it is precisely in this that his revision of the labour theory of value went beyond the political economy of Smith and Ricardo. Marx began by putting forward two characteristics of labour: Useful Labour and Abstract Labour.

13.7.1 Useful labour

In order to distinguish between useful and abstract labour, Marx compared two distinct type of commodities, ten yards of linen and one coat. He observed, the coat sells for twice what the linen sells for and, therefore, has twice the exchange value as the linen. Marx pointed out that both the linen and the coat have a use value, in that they satisfy distinct human needs, and that both the linen and the coat require a certain kind of productive activity to bring this utility into existence. This productive activity, said Marx, is determined by a distinct human aim, using a particular means and aiming for a particular result. This he calls 'useful labour' and it may be defined as the capacity of human labour to bring about 'usefulness' or 'utility' in a commodity and produce simple use values.

Marx said, it is absolutely essential to understand that useful labour is qualitatively different. If it were not, linen and coats could not meet in the market as commodities with different exchange values and confront each other as commodities. Marx reasons that since all commodities contain useful labour, use value cannot exist in commodities unless 'the useful labour contained in them is qualitatively different'. Useful labour creates use values.

According to Marx, only in capitalist society do the products of useful labour take the form of commodities and only in this case are they subject to buying and selling in the system of exchange.

13.7.2 Abstract labour

Here the question arises, what makes the value of the coat worth twice that of the linen? Coat and linen involves two distinct types of useful labour- tailoring and weaving. Tailoring and weaving are both expenditures of human energy, products of human brains, muscles, nerves,

hands, etc. All useful labour shares in common the fact that it is a psychological expenditure of energy which can be measured in units of labour time. The central shift from a qualitative framework in which labour is useful in that it creates use value or utility, to a quantitative framework in which labour is measured by an expenditure of energy quantified by time, yields what Marx called 'abstract labour'. From this point of view, tailoring and weaving are the quantitative expressions of what was a qualitative distinction in different kinds of useful labour. This is to say, weaving and tailoring are now considered quantitatively as an expenditure of labour time and human energy, rather than qualitatively as the creation of specific use values. In order then to make the transition from useful to abstract labour, an abstraction is made from all the specific qualities, skills and aims of useful labour. The abstraction focuses only on what is comparable in all productive labour which is nothing but an expenditure of energy-labour time. This measurement is arrived at only in capitalist society, when useful labour is measured in terms of 'a temporal duration of labour time'. Therefore, the coat and the linen have the same use value and are same when considered in the light of qualitative criteria of useful labour. But when measured quantitatively in terms of the duration of labour time, the coat contains twice as much labour time as the linen. While from the standpoint of useful labour, the amount of labour contained in the linen and the coat are the same; from the standpoint of capitalist production, the coat is worth twice as much as the linen precisely because it has quantitatively more labour time in it. It is this abstract labour which has the characteristic of being equal in an expenditure of energy according to the capitalist, and it is abstract labour which forms the exchange value of commodities.

13.8 Theory of Value

The value that a commodity has does not exist in the body of the commodity as a substance. Marx maintains that the exchange value of a commodity does not lie in it as a substance, but is rather a product of a social framework and thus lies hidden in what he calls the 'value form'. The origin of value lies not in the laws existing for the exchange of commodities or in the money price obtained for them in the market, but rather in the system of social relations.

13.8.1 Relative and equivalent form of value

The value does not lie within the commodity itself and, thus, arises from, what Marx called, its 'relative form'. By the term 'relative', Marx means that the value of a commodity can only be arrived at in 'relation' to other commodities which are seen to have value. No commodity can have value in isolation, by itself. The value of any commodity must be expressed in relation to some other commodity. The value of linen is expressed in terms of the value of the coat. Hence, 'exchange value' emerges only when in capitalist production, the value of one commodity is brought into relation of exchange with another commodity.

Marx stated that value occurs when the relative and equivalent form of value confront each other. Value emerges only when two commodities enter into a comparison with respect to their relative and equivalent forms. The value of linen could not be determined until it is brought into comparison with the value of the coat. Here, the first commodity plays an active role and second commodity plays a passive role. The value of the first commodity is represented as relative value. The second commodity fulfils the function of equivalent value.

13.9 Fetishism of commodities

In order to trace the origin of the concept of value down to its social interconnections, Marx introduced the concept of 'commodity fetishism', and it is here that the exchange value of a commodity takes on a new meaning. Simply stated, a fetish can be defined as the display of unusual devotion towards a material thing or object in the belief that it has extraordinary abilities and powers. Historically, the term 'fetish' was first used to refer to any object which excites intense feelings of attachment and desire, which focuses or rivets attention to a single thing or object by assuming that the object has powers. The term first emerged in the nineteenth century in the description of totemic religions where certain practices were involved in settings objects apart from other objects because they were thought to have greater religious powers. The worshippers came to believe that they obtained their power from the object and that, because of this, the power of the totem flowed to them, but not the other way round.

The concept of 'commodity fetishism' was used by Marx to indicate the process whereby individuals assign extraordinary value and power to commodities which circulate in the system of exchange, and they come to believe that these commodities have powers to the extent that their relations with them resemble a tribal fetish. Marx used the term 'fetishism' to describe the tendency in capitalism for it to be possible that value appears to be a substance inherent in

commodities, and to mark the point historically when we are inclined to assign extraordinary value and power to the things we produce and to find greater value in the relations we have with these objects, making them objects of extreme desire. Marx believed that commodities are mysterious in nature and possess manifest power. However, this mysterious power does not arise from the use value of the commodity but from the exchange value. Marx argues, the mysterious nature of commodities occurs only in societies whose social relations mistakenly compel people to believe that the value of a commodity is, in fact, a part of its nature. When this happens, we form relations with objects we possess- computers, jewellery etc. - often surpass in intensity the relations we form with other human beings. Eventually, the social relations we form with things become so great that they begin to act as substitutes for social relations with others. Marx believed that once this had become established, all social relations in society are shaped by our social relation to things.

Marx further states, when commodities are believed to have value in and of themselves, we mistakenly assign powers to them which they do not have in reality and the powers we assign to them seem to excite powerful desires and passions in us. To understand this process, Marx looked at religion in tribal societies. In tribal societies, individuals assign magical powers to objects because they believed these powers grew out of the object themselves, and as such became fetish objects of religious devotion and desire. According to Marx, objects themselves do not possess any power, and he thought that the hidden source of this power was the individual's active relation to the object. This relation was shaped by the system of social relations in which their beliefs were imbedded and with which they thus tend to form religious relations with objects. Marx thought that the same process takes place in capitalist societies in which individuals confer extraordinary powers and capacities to commodities, and the name he gives to this process is commodity fetishism. Marx believed that it is only at this stage in the history of social development that, as articles of exchange, the products of labour acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values. From this perspective, commodity fetishism is historically determined in that it arises only in societies to the extent that they create the desire to be owned and confer prestige on those who possess them. Possession of commodities becomes the sole aim and object of social life, and when individuals feel valuable only so long as their social relations are based on the possession of these commodities.

13.10 Theory of surplus value

To understand surplus value, we must understand the twin concept of necessary labour and surplus labour. Necessary labour refers to the time in the work day it takes for the worker to produce in wage the cost of his or her own maintenance. Marx reasoned that if the workday is eight hours, it takes approximately four hours of labour to produce the cost of maintaining the worker in food, fuel, rent and clothing. Surplus labour, on the other hand, refers to the part of the working day in which the worker creates during this part of the day belongs to the capitalist alone, not to the labourer.

Marx stated that the labourer is paid only for one part of the workday- four hours rather than eight hours. According to Marx, the first four hours is the cost of their wages since it is clear that with these wages workers are only able to maintain themselves in food, rent and clothing and never get beyond the point of making ends meet. The next four hours is the ‘unpaid part’ of the workday, and this constitutes the ‘surplus’ labour which produces the value for the capitalist but not the worker. In surplus labour, workers expend their labour, but this creates no value for them. Instead, they create surplus value which, for the capitalist has all the charms of something created out of nothing. This part of the working day Marx called ‘surplus labour time’ and to the labour expended during this time is ‘surplus value’.

Surplus value has four central attributes: (a) it is the value created by the surplus labour of the worker; (b) it is unpaid and therefore creates value for the capitalist but not for the worker; (c) it presents a deception since it claims to be paid labour; (d) it is the recognized form of overwork and thus goes to the heart of the exploitation of the worker in that the worker is not paid for the value that is created by their surplus labour.

13.11 Primitive accumulation

Primitive accumulation is a concept used by Marx to understand the coercive forces that were at work during the period of accumulation when capitalism came into being. He thought that this accumulation was the original event leading to the development of capitalism, and he thought that the form of accumulation was primitive because it pinpointed the early crude stages by which capitalist production accumulates masses of labour in order to produce. Whereas Smith and Ricardo had largely thought that this was a peaceful process, Marx argued that in fact it took

the form of violent expropriation, conquest and private enrichment.

The process revealed a pattern of forced accumulation that had divorced the peasant serf from the means of subsistence and had separated them from the conditions of ownership over their own labour. Over the period, the means of production becomes the capital and the serf labourer had become a wage labourer.

According to Marx, the creation of free labour was essential to the development of capitalism, and he believed that the precise focal point for the emergence of the free labour was the battle of accumulation taking place between landholders on the one hand, and agricultural labourers on the other. This is a process which operates two transformations at the same time: first, the means of subsistence is transformed into private property which is subsequently turned into capital; and second, the serf labourer is divorced from the means of production and transformed into a wage labourer.

It was Marx's contention that in order to for capitalism to be possible, labour must be free in the sense of being subject to buying and selling so that it can be purchased as a commodity on the market. But in order for this to take place two essential conditions must be met. First, the processor of labour power must be in the condition of being divorced from the means of production, and as a result must necessarily be compelled to sell their labour in the market in order to live. Second, at the same time that the labourer is free to dispose of their labour for a wage, they must also be forced or compelled to sell their in order to live. This very precise condition of being able to freely dispose of their own labour on the market, and also be forced to sell it, is called 'free labour' and is fundamental to capitalism.

13.12 Division of labour

The division of labour, Marx stated, developed throughout the period of the nineteenth century with the development and progress of manufacturing and industry. According to Marx, the division of labour led to a particular sort of cooperation which he called 'complex cooperation'. Complex cooperation occurred when the skills formerly embedded in the worker became a function of the process of the division of labour itself.

Marx makes a distinction between simple cooperation and complex cooperation. Simple cooperation may be defined as a situation of production in which one capitalist employs a number of craftsman who all perform the same work, for example making carriages. Each

craftsman makes the entire commodity from beginning to end and performs the series of operations necessary to produce the entire commodity. Complex cooperation, on the other hand, occurs when each individual performs operations which are disconnected and isolated from one another and carried on side by side. Each operation is assigned a separate craftsman and the commodity is produced by the combined action of the co-operators, but no single craftsman produces the commodity themselves. In this case, according to Marx, the commodity has gone from being a product of the individual craftsman to becoming the social product of the individual craftsman to becoming the social product of the union of craftsmen, each of whom performs only one operation. The development of the division of labour, said Marx, presides over the breakdown of handicraft skills and the decomposition of handicrafts into different and partial operations. Labour as such becomes transformed into a 'life long partial function'.

13.13 Marxist critique of capitalism

Capitalism has been the subject of criticism from many perspectives during its history. Criticisms range from people who disagree with the principles of capitalism in its entirety, to those who disagree with particular outcomes of capitalism. Among those wishing to replace capitalism with a different method of production and social organization, a distinction can be made between those believing that capitalism can only be overcome with revolution (e.g., revolutionary socialism) and those believing that structural change can come slowly through political reforms to capitalism (e.g., classic social democracy).

Karl Marx saw capitalism as a progressive historical stage that would eventually stagnate due to internal contradictions and be followed by socialism. Marxists define capital as "a social, economic relation" between people (rather than between people and things). In this sense they seek to abolish capital. They believe that private ownership of the means of production enriches capitalists (owners of capital) at the expense of workers. In brief, they argue that the owners of the means of production exploit the workforce.

In Karl Marx's view, the dynamic of capital would eventually impoverish the working class and thereby create the social conditions for a revolution. Private ownership over the means of production and distribution is seen as creating a dependence of non-owning classes on the ruling class, and ultimately as a source of restriction of human freedom.

Marxists have offered various related lines of argument claiming that capitalism is a

contradiction-laden system characterized by recurring crises that have a tendency towards increasing severity. They have argued that this tendency of the system to unravel, combined with a socialization process that links workers in a worldwide market, create the objective conditions for revolutionary change. Capitalism is seen as just one stage in the evolution of the economic system.

Normative Marxism advocates for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism that would lead to socialism, before eventually transforming into communism after class antagonisms and the state cease to exist. Marxism influenced social democratic and labour parties as well as some moderate democratic socialists, who seek change through existing democratic channels instead of revolution, and believe that capitalism should be regulated rather than abolished.

13.14 Summary

In this we have discussed that Marx traced the stages of human history based on economic regimes or based on mode of production. While describing Capitalism, Marx explained how capitalist relations can reproduce themselves. In doing so, a growing quantity of wealth accumulates in the hands of the capitalist class, and an ever-widening gulf opens up between the rich and the poor – between the capitalists and the labourers. To Marx, profit is the main motive of capitalism.

The concepts of forces, relations and mode of production are central to Marxist social theory. The mode of production, which for Marx is the main determinant of social phenomena, is made up of the forces of production and relations of production.

The forces of production refer to both the material worked on and the tools and techniques employed in production of economic goods. The relationships of production refer to the social relations arising in the process of production, especially between the owners and non-owners of the means of production. Relations of production include the control and the capacity to possess the products.

Thus in capitalist societies, for example, the relations of production are those relations that obtain between capitalist and worker such that the former (relations of production) both controls the means of production and can dispose of the goods and services that are produced by the worker.

The forces and relations of production are fundamental to the constitution of any society. The different ways in which different societies are organised depend upon the relationship of the

forces of production to the relations of production. The concept of the social relationships of production does not so much refer to the relationship between individuals as between social classes. Because the relationships of production are essentially antagonistic (for example, the capitalist appropriates the product of labour of the worker), so are the relations between the classes.

A mode of production is the relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production. Modes of production can be distinguished from one another by the different relationships between the forces and relations of production. For example, in the feudal mode of production, the lord does not possess direct control over the peasant's forces of production, tools and land, but does have control over the disposition of the peasant's produce. In the capitalist mode of production, on the other hand, the capitalist controls both the forces of production and the disposition of the product.

Mode of production is an abstract analytical concept. In any particular society at a particular point in time there may exist more than one mode of production. However, it is possible to identify a dominant or determinant mode of production which gains primacy over all the other production systems. Particularly during the period of social revolution more than one mode of production co-exist in the same society. However, Marx has left behind the theoretical conceptualisations relating to four modes of production; Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist. This last mode of production was his major theoretical concern.

13.15 Self Assessment Questions

1. What is capitalism?
2. What is surplus value?
3. Why did Karl Marx preach the 'revolution of the proletariat'?
4. Why does 'polarisation of 'classes' take place under capitalism?

13.16 Key Words

Ancient Mode of Production: It refers to a production system where the master has the right of ownership over the slave and appropriates the products of his labour through servitude, without allowing the slave to reproduce. Asiatic Mode of Production: It refers to community-based production system where ownership of land is communal and the existence of is expressed through the real or imaginary unity of these communities. Bourgeoisie: The class of capitalists who, in all developed countries, are now almost exclusively in possession of all the means of

consumption and of all the raw materials and instruments (machines, factories necessary for their production (Engels in Principles of Communism, 1827) Capitalist Mode of Production: It refers to a production system where the owners of means of production, capitalists, extract surplus labour from the proletariats in the form of profits. Capitalists: The ruling class in capitalism who control the means of production. Feudal Mode of Production: It refers to a production system where the lords appropriate surplus labour from the serfs in the form of rent. Forces of Production: It refers to the material technical aspect of production as well as the corresponding labour power and its competencies required in the production process. Mode of Production: A mode of production is the relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production. Modes of production can be distinguished from one another by different relationships between the forces and relations of production. Relations of Production: It refers to social relationships that arise directly out of the process of production. These social relationships include the relationships between the owners and non-owners of the means of production. These relationships decide and even determine the control and the capacity to possess the product. Workers: Class of producers in the capitalist mode of production who have nothing except their labour power as their only means of livelihood. Their surplus labour is appropriated by the capitalists through profit.

13.17 Study Guide

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Unit-14 Alienation

Structure

14.1 Learning Objectives

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14.3.5 Criticisms

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14.7 Study Guide

14.1 Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of alienation
- Define the concept of alienation
- Explain how the notion of alienation has been used in sociological analysis, particularly with reference to industrial societies.
- Describe the origin, features and implications of modern work organizations perceived by Marx

14.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

It is apparent that Marx was not only a sociologist, but also the expounder of a political doctrine, an outstanding historian, and an economist of the first rank. It is much more difficult to regard him explicitly as a philosopher; for his implicit philosophy – which was bound up with a Promethean humanism, with the concept of ‘alienation’ in its multiple, often contradictory, senses, and with a call to ‘transcend philosophy’ by realizing it is a praxis guided by the knowledge of this realization – is neither very clear nor very profound. The most interesting and precise, as well as least dogmatic, element in it is the realistic and relativistic conception of the science – sociology – which studies this reality as a whole. It is here that Marx integrates in a dialectical way his historical and economic studies, and appears as the first practitioner of economic sociology.

14.3 Alienation

The term alienation first came into use during the nineteenth and twentieth century to describe a state of disruption and change taking place in the human labour process and system of social relations as a result of the development of modern society. It was first used as a philosophical concept in the nineteenth century by Georg Hegel, who employed the term to describe the struggle for self-realisation that took place in the wider historical world. Following Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach and Marx were among the first to give systematic expression to the concept of alienation, and it is their work which constitutes the starting place for a full blown theory of alienation. Marx first outlined his theory of alienation in a work entitled “The Economic and

Philosophic Manuscripts”, which were written in 1844.

To Marx, history of mankind is not only the history of class struggle but also increasing alienation of man from the society. When the society goes on changing, the economic needs of the people increases. The fulfilment of needs demands diversification of economic activity and alienation sources when there is any distinction in the existing relationship among the human beings. The relation between human being, according to Marx, is determined by two things- (a) forces of production, and (b) Relations of production.

Forces of production refers to techniques of production, while the relations of production refers to two types of relationships- (a) relationship between employee themselves, and (b) relationship between employer and employee. Alienation starts when the relation, particularly the vertical relation between the employee and the employer, comes to a saturation point.

Alienation refers to a state where the human relationship is under acute strain. It refers to a state where man gets strained from the process of production and there is a development of withdrawal symptom in individual. Particularly, Marx says, in a capitalist order man’s own creation does not give adequate pleasure. When the product and process of production become unfavourable to him, there starts alienation.

Alienation is basically a problem of labourer class. To Marx, in the capitalist economic order, when the labour is dominated or governed by his or her own creation that gives birth to alienation. The products created by the labour class strengthen the capitalist class. Here, his own creation him as alien power. The labourer does not derive any pleasure from his creation, instead, he gets pain. The entire production process is away from the labourer. There is an objectification of his own creation. The subjective apprehension which provides the aesthetic approval to the producer does not exist anymore. In the capitalist order, quality is surpassed by quantity. The producer is no longer qualitatively conscious, but his competence is estimated in terms of quantity which gives him a strong set back and create alienation in him. Here, the essence determines the existence question of survival of proletariat class. Survival itself depends on his essence. The better he sells, the better is his survival. The better is his labour power, the better he gets accommodated in the labour class in capitalist order.

In the capitalist order, an illusionary relationship develops between the product and the producer, where the producer has absolutely no claim over the product. Though the producer is the key element or the master mind behind the product, it is completely appropriated by the capitalist

class who dominates and determines the market. The surplus value is even appropriated by the capitalist class and the labour class is disappointed.

14.3.1 Causes of alienation

The following are the causes of alienation:

Firstly, in the capitalist order, there is always over-specialisation because it is a mechanical order of production. The labourer becomes the cog of the machines. They cannot achieve any motive according to their own choice in the product. All these create labour super imposition on him. No longer is production the sweet will, desire and choice of the labourer and this creates alienation in him.

Secondly, division of labour, according to Marx, has a prominent role in generating alienation. It seems that when the process of production is diversified, there is division of labour among the labourers. Different labourers are allotted with different tasks and they repeatedly have to perform the same task from time to time. All these promote monotony and boredom in the labourers and frustration is manifested through alienation.

Thirdly, when there is division of labour, no producer has the absolute claim over the product and it has a combination of labour input of several labourers. Therefore, any appreciation for the product does not claim the talent for single producer and this dismisses the producer and creates alienation.

Fourthly, surplus value that is being created by the capitalist society also contributes for generating alienation. In the capitalist society, the surplus value is created by the capitalists by exploiting the labour force. The labour force resents it and gets alienated from the process of production. In simple language, the surplus value is created by the labourers through the labour power but appropriated by the capitalist class. This naturally frustrates the labour class because their sweat and blood sustain and strengthens the capitalists and they get alienated from production process.

Fifthly, the very management pattern of capitalist society also creates alienation. In the capitalist society, the producer class is the labourer but the labourer has no voice and choice in determining the amounts to be produced, the design to be developed or the capital to be invested. All the vital decisions are taken by the capitalists and the labourer mechanically contributes his labour, which creates alienation.

Lastly, the interpersonal relationships are totally absent in the capitalist order of production. The relationship between bourgeoisie and proletariats is a relationship of contradiction, which is very much formal in character. This formal contractual relationship immensely contributes for the process of alienation.

14.3.2 Aspects of alienation

Alienation takes place from four different aspects-

- i. From product
- ii. From process of production
- iii. From community
- iv. From one's own self

14.3.2.1 From product

Alienation occurs from the object or product. He does not have any claim over the production, neither he controls nor monitors the product. He does not decide what he has to produce, how much he has to produce and how he has to market. So he does not develop any love or attachment for the product. In a very mechanical fashion, the labourer produces the product as if the product is outside his ability and mind and thus, alienation from product takes place.

14.3.2.2 From the process of production

Process refers to the routine network that takes while producing a product. In the entire process of production, the labourer considers himself as a cog in the process of production. The work seems to be very much mechanical for him because he does not invest any capital and does not decide any course of action. He is reduced to the status of a machine. As he loses his humanly quality, he gets alienated from the process of production.

14.3.2.3 From community

The relationship in the community seems to be a mechanical type of relationship. The interpersonal touch is totally lost and it is more or less formal and contractual in character. There is a heavy competition and the relationship of labourer with employer is a relationship of

antagonism and contradiction. The primary and face-to-face relationship vanishes and this generates frustration and alienation.

14.3.2.4 From one's own self

The labourer gets alienated from himself and the estrangement of oneself occurs when he loses the charm of survival. The aspiration and expectation of labourers are lost and the labourer leads a very mechanical life and he gets estranged and alienated from himself.

14.3.3 Post-Marxian typology

The post-Marxian scholars have taken up this particular issue of alienation and they have interpreted that alienation takes place in the following situations-

14.3.3.1 Alienation from others

Capitalist economic order creates loneliness and creates dissatisfaction in the existing social relations. When the individual comes to distrust his fellowmen as well as the men around him, at that time he becomes alienated from others.

14.3.3.2 Alienation from process

Alienation from process is nothing but alienation from work and in the capitalist society there is absolute absence of job satisfaction and reinforcement. It leads to alienation from work.

14.3.3.3 Alienation from events and structures

This is maintained through powerlessness, distrust, apathy, incomprehensibility of the situations and the incompatibility of wants and choice.

14.3.3.4 Aliensation from culture and society

It was later termed as 'deviance'. The labour class gets dissociated from popular culture and societal values. There is a rejection of behavioural norms, which is synonymous with anomie.

14.3.4 Seiman's typology

Melvin Seiman termed alienation in terms of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement.

14.3.4.1 Powerlessness

The major symptom of labour in the capitalist societies is powerlessness. The feeling arises because of the phenomenon of absolute monopoly of the capitalist class over the means of production. In the capitalist economy, the survival of the labourer is tagged with selling capacity of labour power and at the same time corresponding demand for his labour power. In this economy, the labourer is enveloped with an assumption that though he is involved in production yet he remains out of it because the labourer neither has resources nor has a role in the decision making process, in designing of the product, in bargaining and marketing of the product. All these situations provide an impression to the labourer that he is a powerless producer and thus becomes the foundation for alienation.

14.3.4.2 Meaninglessness

In a capitalist economic order, there is always a complexity in social organisation. The rationality of the individual is lost because what determines the process of production is not within the purview of the labourer. The labourer becomes a stranger in his own society i.e. the production unit. This reduces his commitment to the process of production and brings alienation.

14.3.4.3 Normlessness

It refers to a condition where the established principles and needs become out dated for the fulfilment of certain desires. The existing needs are found to be instrumental to achieve the ends set up by the society. In the capitalism, the disequilibrium becomes more and more prominent in character because the means of the labour class i.e. their labour power proves to be insufficient to achieve the goals of the society, the material gain. This creates an imbalance between means and goals. The labourer starts resenting the existing means and thus gives birth to normless condition in the society, which again creates alienation.

14.3.4.4 Isolation

This refers to a condition where the individual is not taken as an integrated whole along with society and culture, rather finds himself as an isolated unit. There is a lack of adjustment between individual and society. Particularly, the individual feels the cultural ethos, prevalent in the society, are not favourable to him rather are exploitative and unfavourable to a great extent. Therefore, he starts conforming to these cultural ethoses as norms of society and tries to bring reformation in them through a process of revolution. Revolution is the outcome of resentment which is shown against the existing cultural ethos. In between, the identification of the unfriendly, unfavourable cultural ethos takes place and due to revolution, isolation in labour class also takes place, which again becomes a reason for alienation.

14.3.4.5 Self-estrangement

At this stage, the process of alienation finds a full-fledged manifestation, where the instinct of survival within the individual gradually decreases and his interest for existentialism is lost. Man becomes extremely pessimistic in character, where he finds no hope for the future. Therefore, at this stage, he tries to renunciate his interest in the system of production and the process of output and this propels him to delink his relations with his fellow producers which gradually percolate to the social sphere. Then, finally, to the personal sphere. Estrangement has four level- (a) Psychological- here the labourer develops a psyche that he is an unwanted member in the labour process; (b) Economic- here, the labourer gets estranged both from the process and the product and this leads to alienation; (c) Social- here, the labourer gets isolated from fellow beings and the employer; (d) Individual- here, the labourer gets frustrated from himself. Thus, in the capitalist society Marx says the movement is from absolute integration to isolation.

14.3.5 Criticisms

1. Karl Popper hits upon the isolation concept of Marx. Marx says alienation leads to revolution, but Popper says when alienation is there strong isolation takes place in the labourer class, its integrity is lost, how to launch revolution?
2. According to Melvin Tumin, no capitalist society has ever come to a standstill position, as suggested by Marx. To Marx, due to alienation the process of production comes to a

stagnant situation and becomes totally paralysed. But Tumin views that this can never be a situation in any capitalist society because of the availability of surplus labour. When the labourer class becomes alienated, they are replaced by surplus labour and it won't hamper the process of production.

3. The third criticism relates to alienation and anomie. Marx says alienation proceeds anomie, but on the other way round some sociologists like Merton and Durkheim says it is anomie which proceeds alienation because to them the capitalist class does not stick to its norm and at that moment normless condition takes place which signalises anomie and thus anomie is the precondition of alienation.

14.4 Summary

For Marx, the history of humankind had a double facet: (1) It was a history of increasing control of man over nature and (2) It was a history of the increasing alienation of man. Alienation may be described as a condition in which men are dominated by the forces of their own creation, which confront them as alien powers. The notion of alienation is central to Marx's social and economic analysis. For Marx, alienation is a social phenomenon. To Marx, in capitalist society, all major institutional spheres including religion, polity and economy, were marked by a condition of alienation. Therefore, alienation confronts man in the whole world of institutions in which he is enmeshed. For Marx, alienation in the workplace is important because man is above all Homo Faber, i.e. Man the Maker. So, alienation in the world of work involves 4P's: Man is alienated from the product he produces; from the process of production; from himself i.e. the person; and from the peers. In an alienated society, the whole mind-set of men and their consciousness, is, to a large extent, the reflection of the conditions in which they find themselves and the position in the process of production in which they are variously situated.

Marx's notion of alienation is not really an empirical entity; rather a whole way of looking at the world as well as holding up a standard to evaluate by it. Modern sociologists have tried to measure just how alienated people are in various kinds of jobs, and the results are mixed. Certain kinds of labour, such as on the assembly line, are considered by most workers to be rather dehumanizing. Most other kinds of work (and we must remember that most people, even in factories, do not work on assembly lines) elicit a fair amount of positive reaction; and some people, although a minority, even like working on assembly line. Marx's response would no

doubt be that people can be so oppressed by the system as to lose even their elementary human wants. Further, Marx believed in untapped human potentialities and help up a high standard for society to emulate. Therefore, Marx's theory of alienation is a vision of what humans could and should be if social conditions would allow.

14.5 Self Assessment Questions

- What does Marx mean by alienation?
- Explain the relationship between alienation and the self?
- Describe alienation as an aspect of industrial capitalism?

14.6 Key Words

Alienation: It refers to organised socially in such a way that work is debased and made into a burden; concerned merely with survival.

Commodity: It is a product created to be exchanged in market as opposed to one which has been made for direct consumption. Every commodity must have both the use-value and an exchange-value. It must have a use-value; otherwise nobody will buy it and consequently it would have no exchange value.

Product: Every product which has a use-value does not have, necessarily, exchangevalue. It has an exchange value to the extent that the society itself in which the commodity is produced is founded on exchange. It is in a society where exchange is a common practice e.g. people used to barter salt for needles, where they did not produce needles.

Self: It is the psychological characteristics of the individual. Sometimes, it is synonymously used with self-image.

14.7 Study Guide

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Unit-15 Class and Class Struggle

Structure

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

15.2.1 Theory of Class struggle

15.2.1.1 The class structure

15.2.1.2 Criteria for determination of class

15.2.1.3 Classification of societies in history and emergence of class

15.2.1.4 Infrastructure and superstructure

15.2.1.5 Class and class struggle

15.2.1.6 Class struggle and revolution

15.3 Summary

15.4 Self Assessment Questions

15.5 Key Words

15.6 Study Guide

15.1 Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand whether the treatment of class is consistent throughout the history
- find out on what basis Marx constructs his notion of class
- analyze the role of individual consciousness and political action in social change

15.2 Introduction/Assessment of Prior Knowledge

It is true that Marx did not use the term ‘sociology’, and always showed an antipathy towards Comte, who invented it. In a letter of 12 June 1871 to E. S. Beesly, Marx wrote: My own position is totally opposed to that Comte and I have a very poor opinion of him as a man of science.

But Comte was only one of the founders of sociology, alongside three others: Saint-Simon, with his conception of sociology as the science of society in action; Proudhon, with his investigation of the multiplicity of groups in conflict, and of the changing balance among them, which constitute society, and finally Marx himself, with his study of the interpretation of ‘forces of production’ and ‘social relations of production’, and the conflict between them, of which the class struggle is the most obvious manifestation, and his endeavor to penetrate the secret of the complex interaction between diverse social infrastructures and the ideological superstructures. Marx’s sociology is very much closer to Saint-Simon than to Comte, whose doctrine is evidently contradicted; rejecting its static character, its neglect of social conflict, the doctrine of automatic progress, the absence of an consideration of economic sociology, and in general its ‘spiritual’ orientation. But Marx’s hostility to Comte is the opposition of one sociological system to another; it is no way a denial of possibility of sociology.

The issue of class is one with great resonance, not merely within sociology but in cotemporary western culture and society in general, so that the issue of whether Western society still is, or ever was, a class society still occupies a regular place in the campaigning of politicians and in the pages of the popular press. Much of that debate relates primarily to issues such as the different attitudes and beliefs held by social groups in this country, and to whether these groups receive, fair or unfairly, preferential treatment on these grounds alone. In this sense, the question of class analysis is something that is undertaken regularly, and often extremely competently, by large numbers of the lay public. It has also been investigated, perhaps more thoroughly, by

sociologists; however, for them the notion of class means something more. We begin here with a consideration of the work of Karl Marx, the man whom the concept of class is most often associated. However, there is no systematic definition nor abstract treatment of class in the writings of Marx. Rather, his analysis, together with that of ‘class relations’ and ‘class conflict’, pervades his work (Hall, 1978: 5). For this reason, the treatment of class in Marx is complicated, as the readings will show.

Karl Marx sees human society as a process of development which will end conflict through conflict. He anticipates that peace and harmony will be the eventual result of a history of war and violent revolution. With the exception of the earliest period of society, before the emergence of private property, the major feature of social relationships has been and is class struggle. et those clashes of economic interests will terminate in a classless, conflict-free and creative form of society called communism. Marx’s attention is not, however, concentrated on the nature of the co-operative social relationships of the promised communist utopia. His theoretical writings deal much more with the explanation of existing social realities, and his central contribution to our understanding of society lies in his analysis of the economic causes of social conflict and the ways in which it is contained and suppressed b the ruling class in each ever before breaking forth into new forms of social life.

15.2.1 Theory of Class struggle

Marx’s theory of class struggle finds its ventilation in the simple statement, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle”. The philosophy of class struggle not only appears as the base upon which Marxian philosophy is erected but stands unique among all other contributions of Marx.

15.2.1.1 The class structure

The word ‘class’ originated from the Latin term ‘classis’ which refers to a group called to arms, a division of the people. In the rule of legendary Roman king, Servius Tullius (678-534 B.C.), the Roman society was divided into five classes or orders according to their wealth. Subsequently, the word ‘class’ was applied to large groups of people into which human society came to be divided.

Marx recognised class as a unique feature of capitalist societies. This is one reason why he did not analyse the class structure and class relations in other forms of society.

Marx's sociology is, in fact, a sociology of the class struggle. This means one has to understand the Marxian concept of class in order to appreciate Marxian philosophy and thought. Marx has used the term social class throughout his works but explained it only in a fragmented form. The most clear passages on the concept of class structure can be found in the third volume of his famous work, *Capital* (1894). Under the title of 'Social Classes' Marx distinguished three classes, related to the three sources of income: (a) owners of simple labour power or labourers whose main source of income is labour; (b) owners of capital or capitalists whose main source of income is profit or surplus value; and (c) landowners whose main source of income is ground rent. In this way the class structure of modern capitalist society is composed of three major classes viz., salaried labourers or workers, capitalists and landowners.

At a broader level, society could be divided into two major classes i.e. the 'haves' (owners of land and / or capital) often called as bourgeoisie and the 'have-nots' (those who own nothing but their own labour power), often called as proletariat. Marx has tried to even give a concrete definition of social class. According to him 'a social class occupies a fixed place in the process of production'.

15.2.1.2 Criteria for determination of class

A social class has two major criteria: Objective criteria (i) subjective criteria.

- (i) **Objective Criteria:** People sharing the same relationship to the means of production comprise a class. Let us understand it through an example – all labourers have a similar relationship with the landowners. On the other hand all the landowners, as a class, have a similar relationship with the land and labourers. In this way, labourers on one hand and landowners on the other hand could be seen as classes. However, for Marx, this relationship alone is not sufficient to determine the class. According to him it is not sufficient for class to be 'class in itself' but it should also be class for itself. What does this mean? By 'class in itself' he means the objective criteria of any social class. Obviously, Marx is not simply satisfied with objective criteria above. Hence he equally emphasises upon the other major criteria i.e., "Class for itself" or the subjective criteria.

- (ii) **Subjective Criteria:** Any collectivity or human grouping with a similar relationship would make a category, not a class, if subjective criteria are not included. The members of any one class not only have similar consciousness but they also share a similar consciousness of the fact that they belong to the same class. This similar consciousness of a class serves as the basis for uniting its members for organising social action. Here this similar class consciousness towards acting together for their common interests is what Marx calls – “Class for itself”. In this way, these two criteria together determine a class and class structure in any given society.

15.2.1.3 Classification of societies in history and emergence of class

Marx differentiated stages of human history on the basis of their economic regimes or modes of production. He distinguished four major modes of production which he called the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the capitalist. He predicted that all social development will culminate into a stage called communism. Let us simplify this classification of societies or various stages of human history into (i) primitive-communal, (ii) slaveowning, (iii) feudal, (iv) capitalist and (v) communist stages.

1. The Primitive-communal System

The primitive-communal system was the first and the lowest form of organisation of people and it existed for thousands of years. Men and women started using primitive tools like sticks and stones for hunting and food-gathering. Gradually they improved these tools, and learned to make fire, cultivation and animal husbandry. In this system of very low level of forces of production, the relations of production were based on common ownership of the means of production. Therefore, these relations were based on mutual assistance and cooperation. These relations were conditioned by the fact that people with their primitive implements could only withstand the mighty forces of nature together, collectively.

In such a situation, exploitation of humans by humans did not exist because of two reasons. Firstly, the tools used (namely, means of production) were so simple that they could be reproduced by anyone. These were implements like spear, stick, bow and arrow etc. Hence no person or group of people had the monopoly of ownership over the tools. Secondly, production was at a low-scale. The people existed more or less on a subsistence level. Their production was

just sufficient to meet the needs of the people provided everybody worked. Therefore, it was a situation of no master and no servant. All were equal.

Gradually with time, people started perfecting their tools, their craft of producing and surplus production started taking place. This led to private property and primitive equality gave way to social inequality. Thus the first antagonistic classes, slaves and slave owners, appeared.

This is how the development of the forces of production led to the replacement of primitive communal system by slavery.

2. The Slave-owning Society

In the slave-owning society, primitive tools were perfected and bronze and iron tools replaced the stone and wooden implements. Large-scale agriculture, live stock raising, mining and handicrafts developed. The development of this type of forces of production also changed the relations of production. These relations were based on the slave owner's absolute ownership of both the means of production and the slave and everything they produced. The owner left the slaves only with the bare minimum necessities. In this system, the history of exploitation of humans by humans and the history of class struggle began. The development of productive forces went on and slavery became an impediment to the expansion of social production. Production demanded the constant improvement of implements, higher labour productivity, but the slaves had no interest in this as it would not improve their position. With the passage of time the class conflict between the classes of slave owners and the slaves became acute and it was manifested in slave revolts. These revolts, together with the raids from neighbouring tribes, undermined the foundations of slavery leading to a new stage i.e. feudal system.

3. The Feudal Society

The progressive development of the productive forces continued under feudalism. People started using inanimate sources of energy, viz., water and wind, besides human labour. The crafts advanced further, new implements and machines were invented and old ones were improved. The labour of crafts persons was specialised, raising productivity considerably. The development of forces of production led to emergence of feudal relations of production. These relations were based on the feudal lords' ownership of the serfs or landless peasants. The production relations were relations of domination and subjection, exploitation of the serfs by the feudal lords. Nevertheless, these relations were more progressive than in slavery system, because they made

the labourers interested, to some extent, in their labour. The peasants and the artisans could own the implements or small parts of land. These forces of production underwent changes due to new discoveries, increasing demands for consumption caused by population increase and discovery of new markets through colonialism. All this led to the need and growth of mass scale manufacture. This became possible due to advances in technology. This brought the unorganised labourers at one place i.e. the factory. This sparked off already sharpened class conflict leading to peasant revolution against landowners. The new system of production demanded free labourer whereas the serf was tied to the land, therefore, the new forces of production also changed the relations of production culminating into a change in the mode of production from feudalism to capitalism.

4. Capitalism

Large-scale machine production is the specific feature of the productive forces of capitalism. Huge factories, plants and mines took the place of artisan workshops and manufacturers. Marx and Engels described the capitalist productive forces in the 'Manifesto of the Communist Party'. "Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground". In a century or two, capitalism accomplished much more in developing the productive forces than had been achieved in all the preceding eras of human history.

This vigorous growth of the forces of production was helped by the capitalist relations of production based on private capitalist ownership. Under capitalism, the produces, the proletariat, are legally free, being attached neither to the land nor to any particular factory. They are free in the sense that they can go to work for any capitalist, but they are not free from the bourgeois class as a whole. Possessing no means of production, they are compelled to sell their labour power and thereby come under the yoke of exploitation.

Due to this exploitation the relatively free labourers become conscious of their class interest and organise themselves into a working class movement. This working class movement intensified its struggle against the bourgeois class. It begins with bargaining for better wages and working conditions and culminates into an intensified class conflict, which is aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system. Marx said that the capitalist system symbolises the most acute form of inequality, exploitation and class antagonism. This paves the way for a socialist revolution which would lead to a new stage of society i.e. communism.

5. Communism

The word ‘communism’ originated in the mid-1830s, when it was used by members of the secret revolutionary parties in Paris. It referred to political movement of the working class in capitalist society. It also referred to the form of society which the working class would create as a result of its struggle.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, both terms, socialism and communism, were used interchangeably to describe the working class movement. Marx and Engels also used these terms in a similar fashion.

With the advent of the Third (Communist) International in 1917, the term communism was applied to a form of revolutionary programme for overthrowing capitalism. We can say that the term socialism began to be applied to a more peaceful and constitutional action of long-term changes, while communism referred to a revolutionary action, involving violent forms of changes.

Marx discussed communism as a form of society. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844) he wrote that ‘Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature, through and for man’.

15.2.1.4 Infrastructure and superstructure

According to Marx, every society has its infrastructure and superstructure. Social relations are defined in terms of material conditions which he calls infrastructure. The economic base of a society forms its infrastructure. Any changes in material conditions also imply corresponding changes in social relations. Forces and relations of production come in the category of infrastructure. Within the superstructure figure the legal, educational and political institutions as well as values, cultural ways of thinking, religion, ideologies and philosophies.

15.2.1.5 Class and class struggle

It is clear that according to Marx the mode of production or economic structure is the base or foundation of society. Any change in this infrastructure will cause fundamental changes in the superstructure and consequently in a society. The changes in the mode of production are essentially changes in the forces of production and relations of production. In primitive

communal stage there was no surplus production and hence it had no inequality and exploitation caused by the private ownership of means of production. The means of production were common property of the community. With the development and improvements in the forces of production there was increased productivity. This caused private ownership of means of production and change in the relations of production. This marked the end of primitive-communal system and thus began the long history of inequality, exploitation and class conflict, coinciding with the emergence of slave-owning society.

In the slave-owning society the class conflict between the slave owners and slaves reached a peak causing a change in the mode of production from slavery to feudalistic mode of production. Marx has said that the history of hitherto existing society is a history of class struggle. This means that the entire history of society is studded with different phases and periods of class struggle. This history of class struggle begins in the slave-owning society and continues through feudal society where this class struggle is between classes of the feudal lords and the landless agricultural labourers or serfs. Due to change in mode of production and class struggle a new stage of society i.e., capitalism replaces the age-old feudal system.

In the capitalistic mode of production the class antagonism acquires most acute dimensions. The working class movement begins to concretise and reaches its peak. Through a class conflict between the class of capitalists and the class of industrial labourers, the capitalist system is replaced by socialism. This violent change has been termed as revolution by Marx. This marks, according to Marx, the fifth stage of social development.

15.2.1.6 Class struggle and revolution

Marx said that the class antagonism and subsequently the class conflict in the capitalist system will usher in socialism in place of capitalism through a revolution. Here the question arises what is the basis of this antagonism? Marx's answer is that the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production is the basis of this antagonism. The bourgeoisie is constantly creating more powerful means of production. But the relations of production that is, apparently, both the relations of ownership and the distribution of income are not transferred at the same rate. The capitalist mode of production is capable to produce in bulk, but despite this mass production and increase in wealth, majority of the population suffers from poverty and misery. On the other hand, there are a few families who have so much wealth that one could not even count or

imagine. These stark and wide disparities create some tiny islands of prosperity in a vast ocean of poverty and misery. The onus of this disparity lies on the unequal, exploitative relations of production which distribute the produce in an unequal manner. This contradiction, according to Marx, will eventually produce a revolutionary crisis. The proletariat, which constitutes and will increasingly constitute the vast majority of the population, will become a class, that is, a social entity aspiring for the seizure of power and transformation of social relations.

Marx asserted that the progress of society meant the succession of victories of one class over the other. He assigned his life to planning a victory for the proletariat. In a way, he became a commander, engaged in a campaign. With his solitary aim of defeating the enemy, Marx stressed on acquiring the knowledge of the history of society and the laws that regulate its organisation. His monumental work, *Das Kapital* (Capital, 1861-1879), provided an analysis in which Marx was not concerned with arguments for a class-war. He treated the necessity for such arguments as an unnecessary task. He had no love for emotionalism and humanitarianism and appeal to idealism etc. He conceived of the class conflict on every front and proposed the formation of a political party which would eventually gain victory and be the conquering class.

It was Marx who, for the first time ever, advanced the idea of conflict between classes. Saint Simon wrote about human history as the history of struggles between social classes. In the 1790s Babeuf, a French political agitator, spoke of the dictatorship of the proletariat and Weitling and Blanqui (Babeuf's disciple) developed Babeuf's ideas in the nineteenth century. The French State Socialists worked out the future position and importance of workers in industrial states. In fact in the eighteenth century many thinkers advanced such doctrines. Marx did the admirable task of sifting all this material and constructed a new set of social analysis. His analysis of class struggle was a unique mix of simple basic principles with down-to-earth details.

According to Marx, the bottom rung of the social stratification is the proletariat. Below it there is no class and therefore emancipation of the proletariat will, in fact, be the emancipation of mankind. Marx accepts the right of the bourgeoisie to fight the final war. But for the proletariat the battle is for its very survival and it has to win.

The revolutions of the proletariat will differ in kind from all past revolutions. All the revolutions of the past were accomplished by minorities for the benefit of minorities. The revolution of the proletariat will be accomplished by the vast majority for the benefit of all. The proletarian revolution will, therefore, mark the end of classes and of the antagonistic character of capitalist

society. This would mean that the private ownership of property will be abolished. The proletariat will jointly own means of production and distribute the produce according to the needs of the members of the society. This stage is called the stage of dictatorship of proletariat. This stage will later on convert into a stateless society where the communist system will finally be established in the society. This will also end all kinds of social classes and of all kinds of class conflicts for future. This will also mean de-alienation of the proletariat.

15.3 Summary

Class theory began with Marx whose original statements about the class system that emerges from the social relations of production are primarily political and persuasive in character. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he and Engels outline what has come to be known the abstract model of class, a progressive tendency for society to divide into two great classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. However, the colourful invective disappeared as the optimistic and youthful Marx tried to come to terms with the realities of capitalistic society. A major disappointment was the failure of the European revolutions of 1848. This disjunction theory and experience was explained by Marx as the consequences of the immaturity of capitalism and the development of alliances between the emerging industrial bourgeoisie and the residual and conservative feudal classes, that is, the landed aristocracy, the petty bourgeoisie, and above all the peasantry. Already, then, the originator of class theory, was being forced to recognize not only the persistence of the intermediate classes but also the fractionalization of the historically significant classes.

Class consciousness refers to the recognition by a class, such as workers, of the role its members play in the productive process, and of their relations to the owning class. Consciousness also involves an awareness of the extent to which the owning class exploits the working class by depriving the workers of a fair share of the 'surplus value' created by their work. A final stage of consciousness is reached when the working class understands that only by unified action to overthrow the capitalist owners can the workers hope to achieve their due.

Marx gives an exhaustive view of the existence of bipolar classes in any society. From the beginning of human existence in community, society has been divided into classes because of its absolute dependence on the division of labour which predicted dominance among the ruling class and subordinates among the subjugated class. Marx's sociology is, in fact, sociology of class

struggle. Class struggle has two aspects: (1) the unconscious struggle between workers and capitalists for share in the productive output at a time when class consciousness is not well developed, and (2) the conscious and deliberate struggle between the two classes that occurs when the workers become aware of their historic role and act collectively to improve their situation, and ultimately, to take over ownership of the instruments of production.

15.4 Self Assessment Questions

- What does Marx mean by class?
- Explain Karl Marx's conception of class consciousness.
- Analyze in brief Marxian view on class struggle.

15.5 Key Words

Class: It refers to position in relationship to the means of production and is effectively designated by ownership and control of capital or the lack of such.

Class Consciousness: It refers to the recognition by a class, such as workers, of the role its members play in the productive process, and of their relations to the owning class. For instance, the social system of capitalism develops to a point where the proletariat becomes increasingly aware of their class position in relation to the bourgeoisie.

Class Struggle: It refers to the opposing class interests arising from exploitation. Peasant: He/she is someone who produces in the farms for his/her own consumption

15.6 Study Guide

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