

Block 4

Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim

and Max Weber:

Comparative Perspective

UNIT 10 RELIGION*

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to understand:

- Karl Marx's views on religion;
- Max Weber's views on religion;
- Émile Durkheim's contributions to the sociology of religion; and
- the ways in which the views of these authors differed.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion, as you are aware, 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.

We will begin by examining the contributions of Marx and Weber to the study of religion by going over some important points made by them in relating religion with capitalism. Thereafter, we will briefly review Durkheim's main ideas pertaining to religion. Finally, we will highlight the main points of difference in the approaches of Marx, Durkheim and Weber.

*Adapted by Nita Mathur from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 10 of *Society and Religion* (ESO 15) written by Michael Kennedy and Unit 19 of *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13)

10.2 RELIGION, ECONOMY AND CAPITALISM

Economics is generally a matter of production and distribution of goods. Human beings are directly involved in both the processes of production and distribution. What is produced and distributed depends much on the general pattern of consumption characteristic of a society. Understandably, religious beliefs and values affect one's work ethic, business ethic and consumption patterns.

A religion, which prescribes 'hard work' for salvation, naturally inspires its adherents to be dedicated and committed workers. On the other hand, if work is considered to be a punishment for one's sins by a particular religion, then it is less likely that the believer would be a dedicated and sincere worker. However, there is another way of looking at the above situation. If any religion emphasis more on honesty and sincerity in work, the believer might fail to notice or ignore the exploitation in the factory site.

Consumption patterns too may be conditioned by one's religious belief. If conch shells are of much religious value in a society, it is likely that they will be preserved or saved. If religious beliefs go against consumption of all forms of liquor, then there is a possibility that the number of liquor distilleries will not be exorbitant. True, religion influences the economic activities of people. It is also true that, religions themselves may arise out of crisis situations. Among many tribal communities in India, because of land alienation and poverty new cults emerged. New messiahs or prophets began to institute new cults to meet the crisis situation.

So far it has been demonstrated that religious beliefs and values affect the processes of production, distribution and consumption. Classical thinkers like Karl Marx and Max Weber have pondered over this relationship, with special reference to capitalism.

Economic order varies from age to age. Feudalism, capitalism and socialism are three examples of the economic order. Nature and organization of production, distribution and consumption differ widely in various economic orders. Under the impact of science, philosophy and renaissance, feudalism was breaking down in Europe during 15th and 16th centuries. The catholic church had strong roots in many of the feudal countries. On the transformation of feudalism, there are changes in the religious sphere too. The doctrines of the catholic church were challenged by new streams of thought. Among these were the supremacy of the Pope and the interference of the church in the affairs of the state which came under heavy criticism. As capitalism developed, many protestant sects arose in many European countries. Many scholars tried to understand the relationship between capitalism and religion and in particular Protestantism. Karl Marx and Max Weber are two scholars who shed significant on this relationship.

10.2.1 Karl Marx's Perspective on Religion

Marx was concerned more with the understanding of capitalist order than with the understanding of religion per se. But in his general understanding of capitalism, Marx also developed a general theory of society extending over almost all social institutions, especially religion and politics. Marx's model of society had an economic base which constrains the superstructure constituted by religion, politics, arts etc.

As you know, according to Marx, society determines man's consciousness. Hence, the misery which necessitates religion comes not just from within the individual—but from specific exploitative social conditions. Thus religion is anchored in the society, in Marx's thought. Broadly speaking, Marx's views on religion and its relationship with capitalism has three themes : Firstly, religion is an illusion which veils real exploitative conditions in society; Secondly, religion is a mode of protest albeit in a mild form; Thirdly, religion can be discarded not through a critique of religion, but only changing the societal conditions which give rise to religion.

Religion has a double-function. It acts as an ideology (political ideas of a social class) of the ruling elite. It acts as an opiate of the masses. Much of Marx's understanding of religion seems to have arisen out of his experience of Protestantism of the Prussian state in the early nineteenth century. Marx was critical of the Prussian state which promoted Protestantism, because it helped the state to justify the economic inequalities. It can also be said that protestantism acted as an ideology of the new class which emerged at the break-down of feudalism.

As you know, a commodity is a product of men's labour. In a commodity, the social character of labour appears as an object. Here, the relationship between producers and their own labour is presented as a relationship not between themselves, but between the products of their own labour. Commodities, then are social things whose qualities cannot be understood through the senses—the relationship between human beings become relations between things. Commodities thus become independent. In the same way, religion which is product of man's alienated labour, becomes independent and begins to reign over him. The social relations of man appear as relations of alien objects—both in the world of commodities and the in the world of religion.

10.2.2 Max Weber's Perspective on Religion

Weber applies his concept of rationalization to understand changes in religion, science, arts, administration and politics. For Weber, capitalism itself was born out of a highest degree of economic rationalization.

Weber argues and demonstrates that ideas can become major force in the development process. In the development of capitalism, the ideas supplied by the protestant sects played a major role.

i) West and the East

When contrasted with the East, Weber finds that rationalization has reached a high degree only in the West. Take for example, science, Weber says that only in the Western civilization, science has reached a high stage of development. In his eyes, though India, China and Egypt had great traditions of knowledge, due to the lack of experimental method, they lagged behind in economic development. In various spheres such as music, architecture, legal system, printing system, bureaucracy and capitalism, the West has reached a higher degree of rationalization. Weber points to three aspects, which mark the emergence of rational capitalism: firstly, "rational capitalistic organization of free labour", secondly, "rational industrial organization tuned to regular market" and thirdly "technical utilization of scientific knowledge". Cost-benefit calculation, book-keeping, counting of balance are some indicators of capitalistic organization. Before the arrival of capitalism, there were many magical and religious forces. The protestantism gave rise to an economic spirit, which could overtake all the traditional magico-religious forces and thus paved the way for capitalism.

ii) Catholics and Protestants

Catholics and Protestants were deeply influenced by their religious beliefs in the choice of occupation and type of education. Citing data, Weber says that while protestants sent their children to technical institutions, industrial and commercial training institutes, the catholics sent their children only to humanities education. Protestants outnumber Catholics, among the skilled labourers and administrators.

iii) Spirit of Capitalism

Protestantism, especially Calvinism had an economic ethic conducive for the development of capitalism. The words of Benjamin Franklin such as "Time is Money", "Credit is Money" and "Money can beget money" capture the essence of ascetic protestantism. Earlier in a traditional set-up, people earned for living. But now after the arrival of protestantism, earning becomes a virtue; an end in itself; it shows one's proficiency in his "calling". The labour too becomes an end in itself. After Protestantism, people earned a lot but did not spend lavishly, people worked hard but did not consume luxuriously. This 'spirit of capitalism', had its roots in ascetic protestantism, whose adherents mainly were the rising strata of the lower industrial: middle classes.

iv) Sense of Calling

There are major differences in understanding 'calling' as well as 'labour', between Catholicism, lutheranism, and Calvinism. For the catholic church, calling meant the renunciation of the world in favour of monastic asceticism, whereas for Luther, values' which were necessary for the growth of capitalism were not 'natural' but the outcome of historical development; thirdly, both of them agreed that the "new capitalist entrepreneurial classes

did not come from the pre-capitalist financial or merchant classes... (rather) the new capitalist class was a rising one..." Apart from these, 'calling' meant the fulfillment of obligations attached to one's position. 'Labour' is the 'product of selfishness' according to Catholicism, and it is an 'expression of brotherly love' according to Lutheranism. Luther said that the division of labour, forces every individual to work for others. Luther's concept of 'calling' only means that one has to accept his position in the world and hence its 'economic ethic' was not progressive. It was Calvin, whose interpretation of 'calling', coupled with the 'Doctrine of Predestination', generated intense drive for development of capitalism in countries like Holland, Netherlands, Switzerland etc.

v) Calvinism and Wordly Asceticism

The 'Doctrine of Predestination' holds the key, to the understanding of capitalist spirit generated by calvinist ethic. The doctrine of predestination states that God has already chosen some men for eternal life (salvation) and some men for eternal death (condemnation). Those who are chosen by God form the invisible church of God. According to Calvin, it is impossible to know God's plan and it is not good to know that. Because, God's grace will not be available to those who are not chosen by them for salvation, whatever they might do. Man has to believe that he is chosen by God and has to work for the glory of God, and thus prove his 'faith'.

The doctrine of predestination creates many social psychological impacts : firstly, the individual is left alone because there is nobody to mediate between him and the God, neither the priest nor the church; secondly, the individual has to find his ways himself, for there is no magical way to attain salvation, like sacraments, religious ceremonies, etc. Now, every Puritan has only one question, at his heart, "Am I one of the God's chosen people?" But, there is no answer for this question; not even, through one's deeds can you guess whether he or she is chosen.

The only option left for the Puritan is to believe that he is chosen. Believing so, he has to avoid all sensuous pleasures and enjoyments and has to fight against all sorts of temptations with confidence. The only way to gain this confidence, is hard work for the glory of God. In doing so, it is established that God is acting through the hardworking, confident, ascetic puritan. A puritan has to create the conviction of salvation for himself, and behave carefully at every step in life, for if he commits mistakes there is no place for repentance and rectification. A puritan practices self-control, but works tirelessly to demonstrate his 'faith' that he is one among the " chosen.

When a puritan works hard and earns a lot of money, but avoids luxury, naturally capital accumulates. This can be used for further productive investment. Thus the protestant sects had an economic ethic, which helped the growth of capitalism, particularly in Western European countries.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What is the similarity between commodity and religion?

.....
.....
.....

2) What are the social impact of the doctrine of predestination?

.....
.....
.....

10.3 RELIGION AND COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATION

Durkheim’s work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is an important one. Why was Durkheim interested in the ‘elementary forms’ of religious life? Could he not have directed his attention to major religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity? Let us try to answer this question by taking a simple example from day-to-day life. If you can ride a bicycle, you will find it easier to balance on a motor-bike. Similarly, if the simplest form of religion is understood, it will be of immense use in understanding the complexities of ‘organised’ religions, in Durkheim’s view. The most elementary or simple form of religion will be found in those societies with a correspondingly ‘elementary’ social organisation, namely, amongst the aborigines or primitive tribal communities. It is by understanding the aboriginal religion that Durkheim hoped to contribute to the understanding of complex systems of thought and belief.

In the following sub-sections, we will try and see how he does this.

10.3.1 Durkheim’s Perspective

To define religion, says Durkheim, we must first free the mind of all preconceived ideas of religion. Durkheim discards the notion that religion is concerned only with ‘mysterious’ or ‘supernatural’ phenomena, with gods, spirits and ghosts. He points out that religion is as concerned with the ordinary as the extraordinary aspects of life. The rising and setting of the sun, the regular patterns of the seasons, the growth of plants and crops, the birth of new life are as much a part of religious ideas as miracles and spectacular happenings. To define religion, he says, the various religious systems of the world must be examined in order to derive those elements, or characteristics, which they have in common. As Durkheim (19 12:38) puts it, “religious cannot be defined except by the characteristics which are found wherever religion itself is found”.

According to Durkheim, all religions comprise two basic components, namely, beliefs and rites. Beliefs are the collective representations and rites determined modes of action, which are influenced by beliefs. Religious beliefs as studied by Durkheim presuppose the classification of all things into 'sacred' and 'profane'. There is an opposition between these two spheres which has to be carefully regulated through rites and ceremonies. The sacred is that which is set apart, considered holy and venerated or dreaded and avoided. The sacred is usually in a higher position, valued more than profane things, and its identity and power are protected by social rules. The profane, on the other hand, refers to the mundane, ordinary aspects of day-to-day existence. The sacred and profane are kept apart, says Durkheim, because they are heterogeneous (different), antagonistic (in conflict) and isolated (separated).

Beliefs and rites, says Durkheim, unite to form religion. Beliefs are the moral ideas, the rules, the teachings and myths. They are the collective representations which exist outside of the individual, yet integrate the individual into the religious system. Through beliefs, human beings understand the sacred and their relationship to it. They can lead their lives accordingly.

Rites are the rules of conduct that follow from beliefs, which prescribe how human beings must behave with regard to sacred things. In Durkheim's view rites serve to sustain the intensity of religious-beliefs. They bring individuals together, strengthening their social natures. They are modes of expression of the collective conscience, which, as you have studied, refers to the commonly held values, beliefs and ideas of the community (see Giddens 1978: 84-89).

Durkheim's (1912:62) definition of religion taking into account these factors is as follows.

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community....”

10.3.2 Study of Totemism

As has been mentioned earlier, Durkheim believes that to understand the more complex religions, one must understand first the simple forms. Durkheim maintains that totemism is the most simple form of religion. He chose to study totemism as practised by the aborigines of Central Australia. Ethnographic information on these groups was available in plenty. Their social organisation was the simplest known to sociologists and anthropologists. Totemism is linked with the social organisation of clans. The members of the clan believe themselves to have descended from some common ancestor — an animal, a plant or even some non-living object. The “common ancestor” is the “totemic object”. It is the totemic object that gives the clan its name and identity. But it is more than just a name, it is an emblem. It is often carved, engraved or designed on other objects belonging to the clan, even on the bodies of the clan members. This makes otherwise ordinary or common objects special. They are endowed with

sacredness. Many taboos or 'don'ts' are attached to the totemic object. It cannot be killed or eaten, it must be treated with reverence. All things arranged in the clan are connected with and extensions of the totemic object. The clan members may not be related by blood, but they have a common name, a common emblem. Clan exogamy is thus an important rule. Religion and social organisation are thus intimately connected in such simple societies.

The totemic object and all that is concerned with it is considered sacred. Why? Durkheim maintains that it is not actually the animal or plant itself that is worshipped or held sacred, but a nameless and impersonal force which exists throughout the world and is diffused amongst all the material objects of the world. This force is described by various names "mana" by the Samoans, "wakan" by the Melanesians, "orenda" by some North American tribes. The totemic object is merely a symbol of the 'totemic principle' which is nothing but the clan itself. The clan is given a reality of its own. It is personalised and represented through the totemic object. In Durkheim's view, 'god' is nothing but society apotheosised or glorified and given a different shape and form. Why is society worshipped? Durkheim says that it is physically and morally superior to individuals. It is 'sui-generis', with a reality of its own. Its power is feared, its authority is respected. When a soldier gives up his life to defend the flag of the country, he is not worshipping the flag itself, but what the flag stands for, namely, the nation. Society exists in and through individual conscience. It demands our sacrifices, it strengthens and elevates the divine or sacred within each one of us. This is particularly evident during important religious ceremonies and festivals, which require the participation of the whole clan. Rituals such as festivals help to produce "collective effervescence" or a feeling of collective enthusiasm and involvement which strengthens social bonds and promotes social solidarity.

Briefly, members of a clan venerate a certain totemic object from which they claim descent. This object gives them their identity. But according to Durkheim, it is not the object itself that is being worshipped, but the clan itself. Religion is nothing but giving society itself a divine form because it stands outside of individuals, exerting physical and moral constraints on them. Worshipping society produces in its members a feeling of oneness, solidarity and enthusiasm, helping them to participate in the collective life and expressions of the society.

10.3.3 Religion and Science

Durkheim maintains that scientific thought has its origins in religious thought. Both religion and science reflect on nature, human beings and society. Both attempt to classify things, relate them to one another and explain them. Scientific thought is a more developed and refined form of religious thought. The terms used in modern science like force and power have a religious origin.

Durkheim writes that religious thought will ultimately give way to the advance of scientific thought. He points out that social sciences are in fact undertaking a scientific study of religion itself!

Both religious and scientific thought contribute to the collective representations of society. There cannot be any conflict between the two because both are directed towards seeking universal principles. Thus the goal of both systems of thought is to help human beings rise above the limitations of private, individual nature and lead a life which is both, individual and social. Individuals need society in order to be truly human, and religion and science both contribute to unifying individuals with society (see Jones 1986:149-152). We have just seen how Durkheim focuses on the role of religion in forging social solidarity by unifying individuals in the worship of an entity far greater than themselves, namely, society itself.

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions in 2 sentences each. Use the space below to write your answer.

1) Why is society worshipped, according to Durkheim?

.....

2) Why, in the view of Durkheim, there can be no conflict between religion and science?

.....

10.4 COMPARISON BETWEEN MARX AND WEBER

Birnbaum (1953) points to many similarities between Marx and Weber. Some of them are important ones and worth citing: Firstly, both Marx and Weber agreed that capitalism is not a mere economic system, but it permeates and spreads throughout the society; secondly, both of them agreed that ‘social values’ which necessary for the growth of capitalism were not ‘natural’ but the outcome of historical development; thirdly, both of them agreed that the “new capitalist entrepreneurial classes did not come from pre-capitalist financial or merchant classes.....” Weber agreed with Marx on the idea that capitalist class was the rising class.

The major difference is that, while Marx considered ideas to be simple reflections of social and economic realities, Weber considered ideas to be important for development. Weber did not establish a one-to-one relationship between religion and development. Weber's thesis allows us to say that, after a certain stage of development, religion may serve as the ideology of those who benefitted out of the development. Another difference between Marx and Weber is that, while Weber asserted the criticism of religion from within, Marx ruled that out. For

Marx, the criticism of religion is possible from outside the religion. Moreover, Marx's view of religion as a veiling mechanism applies to all ages, societies and cultural systems, whereas Weber's view of religion as a bearer of ideas for potential development applies to specific historical-cultural systems. In Weber's thesis, we find the emphasis on 'individual', in Marx we do not find the same.

Apart from the above specific differences between Weber and Marx on understanding religion, there are several general differences. For Marx, history is divided into many epochs, characteristic of particular way of the distribution of ownership of means of production. Capitalism is one such epoch in history. Whereas for Weber, capitalism is the specific stage one long drawn out historical process called 'rationalization'. Capitalism is not just an economic system or social system alone for Weber, for him capitalism is also a cultural system marked by rationalization in all walks of life--namely, administration, judiciary, science etc.

10.5 COMPARISON BETWEEN WEBER AND DURKHEIM

Each thinker's methodology provides a certain framework with which he/she approaches substantive issues. You have seen how Durkheim stresses the exteriority of social facts, which he regards as 'things'. Society is 'sui-generis', it exists over and above the individual. Individuals are born and die, but society is more or less eternal. Society imposes certain constraints in order to make the individual a part of it. Weber focuses on the role of individuals as actors, orienting their behavior-patterns in terms of their values and beliefs. It is the task of the sociologists to study these through "verstehen" or interpretative understanding. Weber's and Durkheim studies of religion get their distinct focii or emphases as a consequence of their distinctive approaches to human beings and society.

Let us look at the different types of religious systems, located in very different social settings that they handle, i.e., their units of analysis.

i) Unit of Analysis

Emile Durkheim studies religion in what he believes is its most elementary form. He focuses on tribal society where collective life is pervasive. Ideas are held in common by all individuals and there is an intensity of shared ideas and feelings. This is a society without written historical records. Religion and clan organisation overlap. Thus Durkheim emphasises the role of religion as a collective phenomenon which serves to strengthen social bonds.

Weber, on the other hand, studies the major features of the great world religions. He is interested in their historical roots and their capacity to guide and shape economic activity. These world religions are also seen as responses to the prevailing social situations. For instance, Buddhism and Jainism in India hit out

against the caste system. Judaism was the religion of the oppressed Palestinian peasantry. Protestantism as you have seen was a “protest” against the decadence of the orthodox Catholic Church. Thus, Durkheim’s emphasis on tribal religion visualises the role of religion in maintaining social order, Weber’s analysis looks at the creative role of religion in helping to shape new ways of thinking and acting.

ii) The Role of Religion

Taking the above point further, we can see that Durkheim basically sees religion as an expression of the collective conscience. Worshipping the totem according to him is nothing but worshipping the clan itself. Ideas and beliefs cherished by the clan as a whole thus become part of the individual conscience. The separation between the sacred and the profane aspects of the world is mediated through certain rites. The participation of the whole clan in some important rites helps to bring about collective enthusiasm, linking individuals into social bonds and making them aware of the awesome power of society.

Weber, in contrast, wishes to understand religion in relation to economic, political and historical factors. He sees religion as part and parcel of a larger historical trend, namely, the move towards capitalism, industrialisation and rationality. He is concerned with the role of religion in making the world-view of individuals in different societies favourably or unfavourably inclined towards capitalism and rationalisation.

You have seen how the units of analysis used by these thinkers differ. The role assigned to religion by both of them is also distinctive. Naturally, some of the concepts or categories they use also differ. Weber does not hesitate in using certain concepts that Durkheim strictly avoids.

iii) Gods, Spirits and Prophets

Durkheim denies that religion is concerned with the mysterious, with gods and spirits. He holds that the object of worship is society itself, transformed and represented through certain symbolic objects. Weber does not hesitate to use the idea of gods and spirits. Remember, Weber is dealing with religions, which are of relatively recent origin as compared to the tribal religions. These religions discussed by Weber express certain personal qualities and display a certain level of abstraction. When individuals abstract, they engage in symbolic activity. Let us look at totemism in this respect. Durkheim argues that the totem is the symbol of the clan. Weber takes the example of a totem, which while worshipped as a symbol, is an animal that is sacrificially killed and eaten. The spirits and gods of the tribe are called to take part in the feast. Whilst eating the animal, clan members believe themselves to be united because the spirit of the animal enters them. They are united not merely by the totem as an emblem or a symbol, but they are united by sharing the substance of the sacred animal which is not merely flesh, but spirit.

Weber, unlike Durkheim, attaches great importance to prophets in propagating religious beliefs. Religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam are characterised by great ethical prophets who people revere as the representatives of god, or individuals who have directly spoken to god. They are the charismatic leaders like Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed who capture the imagination and fancy of the people.

Briefly, Durkheim denies that religion is basically concerned with spirits and gods. He maintains that it is society itself, which is worshipped in order to strengthen social bonds and make individuals who are born and who die feel the power and eternity of society. Weber speaks of religion in terms of its creation of abstractions. Thus spirits and gods are reflections of symbolic thought. The role of charismatic, ethical prophets in redefining and remaking religious beliefs is also accounted for.

Let us now compare the views of Durkheim and Weber on religion vis-s-vis science.

iv) Religion and Science

You have seen how Durkheim views both religion and science as providing society with its collective representations. The classifications of science derive from those of religion. Thus there is no conflict or opposition between the two. Weber is not of this view. His comparative studies of world religion show how religious ethics in India and China prevented the growth of capitalism, which basically requires an ethic of mastery, of rational calculation. It is only the Protestant ethic, which provided the appropriate world-view for rational capitalism. Science, as Weber views it, is an expression of rationality and a challenge to the traditional and mystical claims of religion. Science provides empirical knowledge or verifiable factual information, which helps human beings to know and master the world. Thus science and religion, in Weber's view, exist in contrast to each other.

Comparing the views of these authors is not an easy task. They are dealing with such vastly different societies that their findings are bound to be different. But some points do emerge.

Durkheim sees religion as a means whereby individuals acknowledge the physical and moral power of society. Religion is a way of classifying and ordering concepts and is thus the fore-runner of science. Weber studies religion in terms of its meanings for those who follow it, and how these meanings help them orient their actions in other social activities. Science arises as a challenge to religious ideas, driving out ghosts and spirits and replacing them with empirical observations and factual information. You can illustrate the difference between perspectives on religion, advanced by Durkheim and Weber as shown in Table 10.1

Table 10.1 Perspectives on Religion: Durkheim and Weber

ÉMILE DURKHEIM	MAX WEBER
i) Studied primitive religion	Studied world religions
ii) Views religion as an expression of the collective conscience	Views religion in relation to political, economic and historical factors
iii) Strictly avoids using concepts like ‘gods’, ‘spirit’, ‘prophets’	Makes use of these concepts
iv) Considers science as an extension of religion, sees no conflict between them	Considers science and religion in contrast to each other

10.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have tried to see how Marx, Durkheim and Weber dealt with religion as a social phenomenon. We began by examining the views of Marx and Weber on religion in the larger framework of capitalism. We tried to understand the views of Durkheim. We saw how and why he studied ‘elementary forms’ in simple societies. We examined how he arrived at his definition of religion, how he understood totemism as an expression of clan worship and how he saw the continuity between religious and scientific thought. Finally, we compared the views of Marx and Weber, and Durkheim and Weber in terms of the kinds of societies that they studied, the role they ascribed to religion, the concepts they used in their studies and their conflicting views on religion and science.

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10.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Commodity and religion, both are man's creation but, they exist over and above him and sedate him.
- 2) The social impact of predestination is:
 - the individual is left alone because there is nobody mediate and there is no magical cure.
 - work becomes an end in itself. A puritan has to work for the greater glory of God.
 - Conviction of salvation has to be demonstrated through work and self-control.
 - When a puritan earns but desists from spending, monet accumulates which can be productively invested.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Society exerts physical and moral force and authority on the individuals. It is 'sui-generis' and has a reality of its own. Hence it is worshipped.
- 2) Both religion and science contribute to the collective representations of society. Both seek universal principles which will help people lead lives that are both, individual and social. Since religion and science both seek the same goals, they cannot be in conflict.

UNIT 11 ECONOMY*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
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 - 11.2.2 Marx's Views on Division of Labour
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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- compare and contrast the views of Durkheim and Marx on division of labour;
- discuss Karl Marx's and Max Weber's views on capitalism; and
- understand the similarities and differences in their approach to the understanding of capitalism.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Durkheim and Marx lived in an age in which Europe was experiencing the 'Industrial Revolution'. As we have studied earlier in this course, the Industrial Revolution was characterised by a shift in the technique of production. Small-scale, domestic production of commodities gave way to large-scale mass production in factories.

Change took place not just in the economic sphere. Cities and their populations grew and so did the incidence of poverty, crime and other social problems. Social stability and order were under threat. The traditional, feudal society was crumbling and the modern, industrial world was coming into being.

The social context in which Durkheim and Marx lived was such that they had to evolve or work out explanations for what they saw in the society around them. We shall see the very distinct manner in which they approached the process of division of labour. This was a process, which was becoming conspicuous with the advance of industrialisation.

*Adapted from IGNOU Course Material: Units 20 and 21 of *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13) by Nita Mathur

All through this course, you have been familiarised with the socio-economic context, in which the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology have worked and produced their enduring contributions to our subject. You have seen how the period of history, in which they lived and worked was marked by tremendous social change. The challenges and problems of the rapidly changing world reflect in the way they handled various issues and topics. In this Unit we will understand how Marx, Durkheim and Weber understood economy.

In this Unit we will first study Emile Durkheim’s and Karl Marx’s views on ‘division of labour’. Subsequently, we will study Karl Marx’s and Max Weber’s views on capitalism.

11.2 DIVISION OF LABOUR

The concept of division of labour was systematically discussed by the Scottish economist Adam Smith in his work *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith felt that the division of labour was the primary source of economic progress. It was the vehicle through which economic development would advance.

11.2.1 Durkheim’s Views on Division of Labour

As we have already seen in Unit 4, Durkheim’s major concern as a sociologist was the theme of social order and integration. What holds society together? What keeps it in an integrated whole? According to him, the basis or focus of social integration differs in pre-industrial and post-industrial societies. He demonstrates how the process of occupational specialisation or division of labour helps to integrate societies where heterogeneity, differentiation and complexity are to be found.

Durkheim classifies human societies into:

- i) those based on ‘mechanical solidarity’ and
- ii) those based on ‘organic solidarity’.

i) Mechanical Solidarity

As you know, mechanical solidarity refers to a solidarity of resemblance or likeness. There exists a great deal of homogeneity and tightly-knit social bonds which serve to make the individual members one with their society. The collective conscience is extremely strong. By collective conscience we mean the system of beliefs and sentiments held in common by members of a society which defines what their mutual relations ought to be. The strength of the collective conscience integrates such societies, binding together individual members through strong beliefs and values. Violation of or deviation from these values is viewed very seriously. Harsh or repressive punishment is given to offenders. Once again, it must be pointed out that this is a solidarity or unity of likeness and homogeneity. Individual differences are extremely limited and division of labour is at a relatively simple level. Briefly, in such societies, individual conscience is merged with the collective conscience.

ii) Organic Solidarity

By organic solidarity, Durkheim means a solidarity based on difference and complementarity of differences. Take factory, for example. There is a great deal of difference in the work, social status, income, etc. of a worker and a manager. Yet, the two complement each other. Being a manager is meaningless without the cooperation of workers and workers need to be organised by managers. Thus they are vital for each other's survival.

Societies based on organic solidarity are touched and transformed by the growth of industrialisation. Thus, division of labour is a very important aspect of such societies. A society based on organic solidarity is thus one where heterogeneity, differentiation and variety exist. The growing complexity of societies reflects in personality types, relationships and problems. In such societies, the strength of the collective conscience lessens, as individual conscience becomes more and more distinct, more easily distinguished from the collective conscience. Individualism becomes increasingly valued. The kind of grip that social norms have on individuals in mechanical solidarity loosens. Individual autonomy and personal freedom become as important in organic solidarity as social solidarity and integration in societies characterised by mechanical solidarity.

The growth in material and moral density results in a struggle for existence. If, as in societies characterised by mechanical solidarity, individuals tend to be very similar, doing the same things, they would also struggle or compete for the same resources and rewards. Growth of population and shrinking of natural resources would make competition more bitter. But division of labour ensures that individuals specialise in different fields and areas. Thus they can coexist and, in fact complement each other. But does this ideal state of affairs always prevail?

Let us see what Durkheim says:

Abnormal Forms of Division of Labour

If division of labour helped societies achieve integration and a newer, higher form of solidarity, why was European society of that time in such a chaotic state? Was division of labour creating problems? What had gone wrong?

According to Durkheim, the kind of division of labour that was taking place was not the 'normal'-type that he wrote about. Abnormal types or deviations from the normal were being observed in society. Briefly, these included the following:

- i) **Anomie:** This term means a state of normlessness. Material life changes rapidly, but rules norms and values do not keep pace with it. There seems to be a total breakdown of rules and norms. In the work sphere, this reflects in conflicts between labour and management, degrading and meaningless work and growing class conflict.

To put it simply, individuals are working and producing but fail to see any meaning in what they are doing. For instance, in a factory assembly-line workers have to spend the whole day doing boring, routine activities like fixing screws or

nails to a piece of machinery. They fail to see any meaning in what they do. They are not made to feel that they are doing anything useful, they are not made to feel an important part of society. Norms and rules governing work in a factory have not changed to the extent that they can make the worker's activities more meaningful or show the workers that society needs and values them.

- ii) **Inequality:** Division of labour based on inequality of opportunity, according to Durkheim, fails to produce long-lasting solidarity. Such an abnormal form results in individuals becoming frustrated and unhappy with their society. Thus tensions, rivalries and antagonism result. One may cite the Indian caste system as an example of division of labour based on inequality. People have to do certain kinds of work not because of their capacity but because of their birth. This can be very frustrating to those who want to do more satisfying or rewarding jobs, but cannot have access to proper opportunities.

- iii) **Inadequate organization:** In this abnormal form the very purpose of division of labour is destroyed. Work is not well organised and coordinated. Workers are often engaged in doing meaningless tasks. There is no unity of action. Thus solidarity breaks down and disorder results. You may have observed that in many offices, a lot of people are sitting around idly doing little or nothing. Many are unaware of their responsibilities. Collective action becomes difficult when most people are not very sure of what they have to do. Division of labour is supposed to increase productivity and integration. In the example discussed above, the opposite takes place (see Giddens 1978: 21-33).

So far in this unit, we have seen how Durkheim views division of labour not just as an economic process but a social one. Its primary role, according to him, is to help modern industrial societies become integrated. It would perform the same function for organic solidarity that the collective conscience performed in mechanical solidarity. Division of labour arises as a result of the competition for survival brought about by growing material and moral density. Specialisation offers a way whereby various individuals may coexist and cooperate.

But in the European society of the time, division of labour seemed to be producing entirely different and negative results. Social order seemed to be under serious threat.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Fill up the blanks in the following sentences.
 - a) The Industrial Revolution marked a change from Production of commodities to production in factories.
 - b) was becoming more conspicuous with the advance of industrialisation.
 - c) said that division of labour was the primary source of economic development

- 2) State whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F)
- | | |
|---|-----|
| a) Division of labour leads to wastage to time. | T/F |
| b) Durkheim wanted to study the economic aspect of division of labour | T/F |
| c) Division of labour leads to specialisation | T/F |

Let us now move on to the next section and study the views of Karl Marx on division of labour.

11.2.2 Marx's Views on Division of Labour

Let us first try to understand what Marx means by division of labour. In this analysis of the topic in the first chapter of 'Capital', Volume 1, Marx pin-points two types of division of labour, namely, social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture.

- i) **Social division of labour:** This exists in all societies. It is a process that is bound to exist in order that members of a society may successfully undertake the tasks that are necessary to maintain social and economic life. It is a complex system of dividing all the useful forms of labour in a society. For instance, some individuals produce food, some produce handicrafts, weapons and so on. Social division of labour promotes the process of exchange of goods between groups, e.g., the earthenware pots produced by a potter may be exchanged for a farmer's rice or a weaver's cloth. Such exchanges spur on or provide an impetus to specialisation.
- ii) **Division of labour:** in industry or manufacture: This is a process, which is prevalent in industrial societies where capitalism and the factory system exist. In this process, manufacture of a commodity is broken into a number of processes. Each worker is limited to performing or engaging in a small process like work in an assembly line. This is usually boring, monotonous and repetitive work. The purpose of this division of labour is simple; it is to increase productivity. The greater the productivity the greater the surplus value generated. It is generation of surplus value that motivates capitalists to organise manufacture in a manner that maximises output and minimises costs. It is division of labour, which makes mass production of goods possible in modern, industrial societies. Unlike social division of labour where independent producers create products and exchange them with other independent producers, division of labour in manufacture completely divorces the worker from his product.

Let us examine this point in more detail by trying to understand the implications of division of labour in manufacture:

- i) **Profits accrue to the capitalist:** As earlier described, division of labour in manufacture help to generate more and more surplus value leading to capital accumulation. Marx tackles a crucial question, namely, who takes away the profits? Not the workers, says Marx, but the capitalists. Not those who

actually produce, but those who own the means of production. According to him, division of labour and the existence of private property together consolidate the power of the capitalist. Since the capitalist owns the means of production, the production process is designed and operated in such a way that the capitalist benefits the most from it.

- ii) **Workers lose control over what they produce:** According to Marx with division of labour in manufacture workers tend to lose their status as the real creators of goods. Rather, they become mere links in a production chain designed and operated by the capitalists. Workers are separated from the products of their labour; in fact, they hardly ever see the end result of their work. They have no control over its sale and purchase. For example, does a worker in an assembly line in a factory producing washing-machines really get to see the finished product? He/she might see it in an advertisement or at a shop window. The worker will not be able to sell it or afford to buy it, having been merely a small part of the production of that machine. The actual control over it is exercised by the capitalist. The worker as an independent producer no longer exists. The worker has become enslaved by the production process.
- iii) **Dehumanisation of the Working Class:** The capitalist system characterised by division of labour is one where workers stop being independent producers of goods. They become suppliers of labour-power, which is needed for production. The worker's individual personality needs and desires mean nothing to the capitalist. It is only the worker's labour-power which is sold to the capitalist in exchange for wages that concerns the capitalist. The working class is thus stripped of its humanness and labour-power becomes a mere commodity purchased by the capitalist, in Marx's view.
- iv) **Alienation:** One of the important concepts developed by Marx in understanding the realities of the industrial world is that of alienation.

The process of production and division of labour is one which forces the worker to do boring, tedious, repetitive work. The worker is robbed of all control over his/her work. The worker becomes alienated from the products he/she is creating, from the production process he/she is a part of, from fellow workers and from society at large (see Kolakowski, 1978: 281-287).

11.2.3 Comparison between Durkheim and Marx

We have separately studied the views of Durkheim and Marx on division of labour. Let us now compare their views.

i) **Causes of Division of Labour**

Both, Durkheim and Marx make a very clear distinction between division of labour in simple societies and complex industrial societies. Division of labour is an inevitable and necessary aspect of the socio-economic life of any society. But they are more concerned and interested in the division of labour that takes place in industrial societies.

Durkheim explains division of labour in industrial societies as a consequence of increased material and moral density. As we have studied earlier, he looks at specialisation or division of labour as a means through which competition or the struggle for existence can be eased. Specialisation is what makes it possible for large numbers of people to live and work together without fighting, because each has a distinct part to play in society. It makes teamwork and coexistence possible.

Marx too considers division of labour in manufacture a feature of industrial society. But unlike Durkheim, he does not see it as a means of cooperation and coexistence. Rather, he views it as a process forced upon workers in order that the capitalist might extract profit. He sees it as a process closely linked with the existence of private property. The means of production are concentrated in the hands of the capitalist. Therefore, the capitalist has to design a production process that will result in maximum profit. Hence, division of labour is imposed on workers. They sell their labour-power to the capitalist for wages. They are reduced to doing monotonous, boring and unimaginative activities so that productivity increases and the capitalist's profits increase.

Briefly, Durkheim says the causes of division of labour lie in the fact that individuals need to cooperate and do a variety of tasks in order that industrial society may survive. According to Marx, division of labour is imposed on workers so that the capitalists may benefit. Durkheim stresses cooperation, whilst Marx stresses exploitation and conflict.

ii) Consequences of Division of Labour

Following from their differing views on the causes of division of labour in modern industrial societies, Durkheim's and Marx's perceptions on the consequences of division of labour too are bound to be different. Durkheim, as earlier mentioned, sees division of labour as a process that would help individuals coexist and cooperate. We have already studied how he views division of labour as being a force of social integration promoting organic solidarity. In a "normal" situation, division of labour contributes to social integration by giving each individual a specialised activity to perform. Each can develop his/her powers of creativity and innovation in his or her specialised task. At the same time, each would depend more and more on others doing complementary activities. Thus social bonds would become more firm, more enduring.

The states of anomic or normlessness lead to division of labour based on inequality and inadequate organisation are pathological or abnormal forms, according to Durkheim. They are not caused by division of labour as such. They are the result of society being in a state of flux. Norms, rules and regulations governing new economic relations have not yet come into being. The economic sphere is changing rapidly, but new norms regulating it have not yet emerged properly.

Marx, on the other hand, sees division of labour as a process imposed on workers by capitalists. Its consequences, as we have already studied, are that it leads to dehumanisation of the work force. Alienation results. Workers are reduced to things. Their creativity, their control over their creation is taken away. Their labour becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold at the market place. Thus they become mere parts of the production process rather than the producers themselves. Their personalities, their problems mean nothing to their employers. They are regarded as nothing more than work-machines. Thus they are literally dehumanised. Being part of a system they cannot control, they suffer from alienation at all levels; from their work, their fellow-workers and the social system itself.

Briefly, Durkheim sees division of labour as a process that can be the basis of integration. Marx sees it as a process bringing about dehumanisation and alienation, separating the creators from their creation. The workers become slaves of the system of which they should have been the masters.

iii) Solutions to the Problems Related to Division of Labour

As we have seen earlier, Durkheim sees division of labour as a process, which under normal circumstances will bring about social integration. The pathological or abnormal forms of division of labour that prevail in society have to be solved in order that division of labour might perform its integrative functions.

Anomie according to Durkheim can be handled by making workers conscious of their role in society. By making them feel organically linked and involved with the life of society, the frustration of doing “meaningless” work can be eased. Meaninglessness will then be changed into an awareness of the significance of their productive roles.

According to Marx, capitalism itself is the problem. Division of labour brings about dehumanisation, alienation and loss of control. The way out is through revolution, through which workers gain control over the means of production. They will then organise and operate the production process in such a manner that dehumanisation and alienation will become things of the past.

iv) Durkheim’s ‘Functional Model’ of Society and Marx’s ‘Conflict Model’

Durkheim’s study of division of labour brings out his functional model of society. Social institutions and processes are viewed by him in terms of the contributions they make to keeping a society alive. You have studied this in Unit 18 of this Block. Durkheim tries to give an explanation to the question of order. Remember, he lived at a time when social order seemed to be under threat. His task therefore was to demonstrate that the changes that were taking place would not destroy society but contribute to integrating the new society that was emerging. Durkheim does not merely look at the economic aspect of division of labour but rather its social aspect, its contribution to social integration.

Marx responds quite differently to the challenges thrown up by industrialisation. He does not share Durkheim's view that society is basically in a state of equilibrium and that social institutions and processes exist only because they help to integrate society. Marx views human history as a history of class struggle, or a series of struggles between the oppressors and the oppressed. Capitalism is a phase in human history marked by the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The system of production that exists under capitalism is designed to exploit the workers. The interests of the workers conflict with those of the capitalists. The revolution of the proletariat, Marx believes, will overthrow the old system and bring in the new. Contradictions, conflict and change are the keywords in Marx's understanding of society.

Briefly, Durkheim sees society as a system held together by the integrative contributions of its various institutions. Marx sees history as a series of struggles between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. This leads to conflict and change. This is the main difference in their approaches.

11.3 CAPITALISM

Tom Bottomore (1973) in His Dictionary of Marxist Thought sets down some of the main features of capitalism. As a mode of production, capitalism is characterised by the following features:

i) Production for sale rather than for self-use

By this we mean a shift from a subsistence economy. In most pre-capitalist economies, production is undertaken for direct consumption. For instance, in agricultural economies, farmers grow crops for their own use, only a small surplus is available for sale. This is because technology is not so advanced and domestic or family labour is used for farming. Such is not the case in a capitalist economy. Here, a large number of workers gather together in a factory. With the help of machines and through division of labour, goods are produced on a mass scale. They are produced for sale in the market. For instance in a factory producing soap, the output is not for the self-use of the producers. It is for sale in the market.

ii) The existence of a market where labour-power is bought and sold

According to Marx, workers are regarded only in terms of their labour-power. The capitalist or owner hires their labour-power by paying them wages. Workers can sell their labour power or withhold it because they are legally free. Unlike in the earlier stages of human history, workers are not forced to work like slaves or serfs. Sheer economic need forces them to work. They must either work or starve. So, although they are legally free to enter or not enter into contracts with the capitalist, they are not free from hunger, which forces them to sell their labour.

iii) Exchange takes place through money

As we have seen in point (1) production is undertaken for sale, and sale is transacted through the use of money. Money is the social bond that ties together the various elements in the capitalist system. Hence the role of banks and financial institutions becomes important in the system.

iv) The capitalist controls the production process

Not only does the capitalist control the hiring and firing of workers, but also decides how production is to be carried out. He decides what is to be produced, the composition of raw materials and machines, and the manner in which the output is to be marketed.

v) The capitalist controls financial decisions

This is related to the earlier point. Decisions regarding pricing of the product, wages of the workers, the amount of financial investment and so on are taken by the capitalist.

vi) Competition

Since the whole idea of capitalism is production for sale, there is bound to be competition between capitalists. Whose products will sell the most in the market? Whose profits will be the maximum? This leads to a situation in which each tries to outdo the other. The consequences could be innovation or the use of the latest technology. Competition could also result in the formation of 'monopolies' or 'cartels', where a single producer or group of producers try to dominate the market by pushing or forcing out competitors.

This leads to further concentration and centralisation of capital in a few hands. Capitalism thus is a system, which according to Marx symbolises the most acute form of exploitation, inequality and polarisation of classes. By this is meant that the social distance between the owners of the means of production (i.e., the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat) becomes greater and greater.

11.3.1 Marx's Views on Capitalism

Karl Marx maintains that economic activity and the economic structure is the basis on which social life rests. The economic base or infrastructure comprises a certain mode of production and certain forces and relations of production. The mode of production is not the same everywhere and at all times; it changes during the course of human history. Marx and Engels outline certain stages of world history each characterised by a distinctive economic formation. It is this economic formation that shapes other social sub-systems, which are termed as superstructure like the political structure, religion, values and culture. In German Ideology, Marx and Engels broadly outline four stages of history. These are (i) the primitive communal stage, (ii) the ancient stage based on slavery, (iii) the feudal stage, (iv) the capitalist stage. The study of human history in terms of stages each with its own distinct mode of production forms the basis of the Marxian theory of historical materialism.

As just mentioned each of these stages has a mode of production peculiar to itself. Each stage follows logically from the previous one. This is because each stage contains certain inner contradictions or tensions. These contradictions eventually break the system down and a new stage emerges from the womb of the old.

i) Capitalism: A Stage in Human History

The stage of capitalism, according to the Marxist interpretation of history, is a natural outcome of the contradictions within the feudal system. The feudal order was marked by the oppression of 'serfs' by the feudal lords. The tensions within the system lead to the breakdown of feudalism freeing large numbers of tenants from the feudal lands. The growing towns absorbed these people. A labour force thus became available for product manufacture. The development of new machines, the birth of the factory system and the mass production of goods consolidated the new economic system called 'capitalism'.

The point that must be stressed is that Marx views capitalism from a historical perspective. Marx does not consider individual members of society as the focus of his theory. He speaks in terms of the whole society. To him, capitalism is a stage in the development of human society, which arises from the contradictions of an earlier stage. It is a stage that will generate its own contradictions too, as we shall see later. The contradictions inherent in capitalist society will set the stage for the development of Marx's ideal society, the communist society which will be free of the contradiction and tensions of the earlier stages.

ii) Capitalism and Class Conflict

According to Marx, the history of human society is the history of class struggle. Each stage in human history is marked by a division of society into two groups, the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', those who dominate and those who are oppressed.

The very foundations on which capitalism survives, namely, the existence of private property, mass production of commodities under the factory system for profit and the existence of a working class that is forced to sell its labour-power in the market, leads to polarisation of classes.

As capitalism progresses, these class divisions become wider. The interests of the bourgeoisie and proletariat become more and more separate. The proletariat becomes unified. After all, they share the same problems and begin to seek the same solutions. A 'class in itself' becomes a 'class for itself'. The revolution of the proletariat will, according to Marx, bring in a new stage of history, 'communism', where the owners of the means of production will be the workers themselves. The contradictions of capitalism will be overcome and a new social order will be born.

Briefly, Karl Marx views capitalism as one of the stages in human history, which emerges out of the contradictions of the previous stage. Capitalism too, is beset with inner contradictions. It is a stage in which class conflict is at its greatest intensity. After all, the means of production are concentrated in a few hands. The labour force is considered only in terms of its labour-power, which can be bought and sold for a price namely, wages. The inequalities of the system lead to polarisation of classes.

The proletariat comes to realise that they have common interests and common problems and will seek solutions to these problems. The proletariat will not just remain a “class in itself” but become a “class for itself”. Their liberation will be through revolution. The revolution of the proletariat will usher in a new stage, communism, where the means of production will be in the hands of the workers themselves.

11.3.2 Weber’s Views on Capitalism

The following sub-sections on Max Weber’s analysis of capitalism will make clear how Max Weber takes an independent and more complex view of capitalism. Weber speaks of a special kind of capitalism, namely, ‘rational capitalism’. Rational capitalism, according to him, is a uniquely western development (by the west we refer to West Europe and North America). This is because the idea of rationality and the process of rationalisation too are distinctively western.

It is important to bear the link between ‘rationality’ and ‘rational capitalism’ constantly in mind. For this purpose we will now discuss Max Weber’s views on rationality.

i) Weber on ‘Rationality’

To understand Max Weber’s ideas regarding capitalism, it is important to first review his understanding of rationality. The growth of ‘rationality’ in the western world is closely connected with capitalism as you shall soon see. What did Weber mean by rationality and rationalisation? As you have already studied in Unit7, rationality is a product of the scientific specialisation which is an important feature of western culture. It involves gaining mastery or control of the external world. It involves the organisation of human life in such a manner that greater efficiency and productivity can be attained.

Briefly, rationalisation means an attempt by humans to control the environment by organising and coordinating human activities in a certain regular and predictable manner. Events are not left to chance or to nature. Human beings have gained such a degree of understanding about the world around them that nature is no longer regarded as ‘mysterious’ or ‘incalculable’. Through the use of science and technology, written rules and laws, human activity is systematised. Let us take an example from our day-to-day life. There is a vacancy in an office. One manner of filling the vacancy would be to appoint one’s friend or relative. But this is not ‘rational’ in the Weberian sense. Another way would be to

advertise in the newspapers, hold a competitive examination and an interview and select the candidate with the best result. In this method, certain rules and codes have been applied. A certain regularisation, which the first method did not have, has been introduced. Weber would call this an example of rationalisation.

ii) Rationalisation and Western Civilisation

According to Weber, rationalisation has been the most distinctive feature of western civilisation. It is rationality, which marks out a number of distinct traits or features, which are not to be found at one and the same time anywhere else in the world. These features include:

- a) Science, a body of verifiable knowledge well developed in the west.
- b) A rational state with specialised institutions, written laws and a constitution, which regulates political activity.
- c) Art like western music, for example which has a system of notation, simultaneous use of a number of instruments and so on which are not be observed to the same extent in other systems of music.
- d) Economy which is characterised by rational capitalism. We will study this in detail in the following sub-section.

Rationality, as you can see, is not just restricted to a few aspects of human life. Rather, it penetrates and influences all areas of life. It is the most distinctive characteristic of western society (see Freund, 1972:17-24).

iii) Traditional and Rational Capitalism

Does capitalism merely mean a system for the creation of profit? Is greed or desire for wealth the only characteristic of capitalism? In that case, capitalism existed in most parts of the world. It existed amongst the merchants of ancient Babylon, India and China and Medieval Europe with its powerful merchant guilds. But it was not 'rational' capitalism.

In traditional capitalism, most households are self-sufficient and produce for self-consumption the basic necessities of life. Traditional capitalists mostly trade in luxury goods. Their markets are thus restricted to a few products and a small, select group of clients. Overseas trade is a risky business; in their hunger for profits, traditional capitalists sell goods at exorbitant rates. Business is a gamble. If successful, the gains are great and so are losses if business fails.

Modern or rational capitalism is not restricted to the production and sale of just a few luxurious or rare commodities. It includes everything; all the ordinary goods in everyday use from bread to cloth to utensils and tools. Unlike traditional capitalism, rational capitalism is dynamic and constantly expanding. New innovations, new methods of production and new products are constantly being invented. Rational capitalism depends on mass production and distribution. Goods must be exchanged in a predictable and repeatable way. Business is no longer seen as a gamble. The modern capitalist does not sell a few products to a few people at a high cost. The idea is to have plenty of customers buying plenty of goods which all can afford.

In short, traditional capitalism is restricted to a few producers, a few commodities and a few clients. The element of risk is high. Business is a gamble. Rational capitalism on the other hand, aims at making all goods marketable. It involves mass production and distribution. Business becomes methodical and regular. In the above discussion, we studied the difference between traditional and rational capitalism.

iv) Pre-conditions for Rational Capitalism — In What Sort of Socio-economic Milieu can Capitalism Develop?

The basic principle underlying modern capitalism, according to Weber, is the rational organisation of productive enterprises, which supply society with its everyday wants. In this sub-section, we shall see what preconditions or socio-economic milieu is necessary for the development of rational capitalism:

- a) Private ownership of material resources necessary for production (e.g. land, machines, raw materials, factory buildings etc.): The ownership of the means of production by private producers enables these producers to organise a business or enterprise. They can assemble the means of production and initiate the process of production of commodities because they own the means of production.
- b) Free market: There should be no restrictions on the flow of trade. The political situation should be more or less peaceful. This will allow economic activity to go on undisturbed.
- c) Rational techniques of production and distribution of goods: This includes the use of machines to speed up production and the application of science and technology in production and distribution of commodities so that a greater number and variety of goods may be produced with maximum efficiency.
- d) Rational legislation: There should be a system of laws, which apply to all the members of society. This would simplify the making of economic contracts. Each individual would have certain legal obligations and rights, which would be codified or written down.
- e) Free labour force: Labourers have the legal freedom to work where and when they want to. Their relationship with the employers is contractual, not obligatory. However, though legally free, Weber like Marx is aware that economic compulsions and sheer hunger will make them work. Their “freedom” is thus formal freedom only. In practice, necessity dictates that they work.
- f) Commercialisation of the economy: To make rational capitalism possible, there must be opportunities for everyone to participate in an enterprise. Individuals can buy stocks, shares bonds etc. and thus become part of the enterprise.

Briefly, rational capitalism is an economic system, which requires that the means of production be privately owned and controlled. With the help of rational technology, goods are produced and freely traded in the market. Workers enter into contracts with their employers, as they are legally free. As all individuals are governed by a common legal system, the making of business contracts is made easy. This system is thus qualitatively different from any other that existed before it.

Let us now study how Weber explains the rise of the rationalisation of the economic system. As we shall see in the next sub-section, Weber views capitalism as too complex a phenomenon to be explained away by a single factor. The development of rational capitalism is spurred on by multiple factors, all acting and reacting with each other and producing a certain blend of features, which characterise rational capitalism. We shall be considering the economic, political and cultural or religious factors, which Weber discusses.

v) Factors Contributing to the Growth of Rational Capitalism

It is a common misconception held by some students and scholars that Weber neglects economic factors in his discussion of capitalism. This is not correct. It is only that he does not emphasise economic factors to the extent that Marx does. Let us briefly highlight Weber's view on the role of economic and political factors in the growth of capitalism:

a) Economic Factors: Weber mentions the gradual separation in Europe between the 'household' and 'trade' or business. The process of small-scale domestic production of items for self-consumption gives way to mass production in factories. The spheres of household activity and work become distanced. The growth of transport and communication also contributes to rationalisation of the economy. The use of a common currency and the practice of book-keeping make economic transactions easier.

b) Political Factors: The rise of modern western capitalism is closely connected with the growth of the bureaucratic rational-legal state. The idea of citizenship assumes prominence. Citizens are given certain legal rights and obligations. The bureaucratic state helps to break down feudalism and to free land and labour for the capitalist market. The bureaucratic state helps to pacify and politically control large territories. This provides a climate of relative political peace for business to be conducted smoothly. Rationalisation finds full expression in the rise of the bureaucratic state, which in turn contributes to the growth of rational capitalism.

In the above discussion, we have seen how Weber tries to describe the rise of rational capitalism in terms of economic and political factors. We have seen how the shift from domestic to factory production, widespread use of currency, communication and technology helps to shape the new economic system. We have also seen how the bureaucratic state provides certain legal rights and safeguards and a favourable political environment in which business can prosper.

But these explanations alone are not adequate, according to Weber. Human behaviour according to him is a reflection of the meanings human beings ascribe and ideas human beings have about their situation. Underlying human action is a certain ethos, a certain world-view, in keeping with which humans orient their activities. What was the ethos of the earliest Western capitalists? How did they view the world around them and how did they locate their own positions in it? Weber found out an interesting statistic, namely, that the majority of leading businessmen, professionals and bureaucrats of that time were Protestants. This led him to speculate on whether the teachings of Protestantism had any bearing on economic behaviour.

c) Religious/Cultural Factors - The Protestant Ethic Thesis: At the very outset it must be pointed out that the “Protestant ethic” and the “spirit of capitalism” (by which Weber referred to an ideal type of the main features of capitalism) do not have a mechanical or monocausal relationship. The Protestant ethic according to Weber is one of the sources that bred rational capitalism.

Calvinism, one of the Protestant sects that Weber spoke of, referred to ‘predestination’. This refers to the belief that certain individuals were ‘elected’ by god to attain salvation. This led to a rejection of the sacraments by its followers. Rituals and prayers stopped being so important. The doctrine of predestination created an enormous amount of anxiety and loneliness. The early Protestants sought signs of their election by god by striving for professional success. The notion of calling resulted in relentless pursuit of hard work and optimum use of time. Individuals led a highly disciplined and organised lifestyle. Constant self-control through systematic effort of will resulted in the rationalisation of individual conduct. This reflected in the way business was conducted. Profits were not wasted on worldly pleasures. They were reinvested so that they could be purposefully used to further expand business. Thus, the this-worldly asceticism that Protestantism preached led to rational organisation of every-day affairs. Asceticism or rigorous discipline and self-control were no longer restricted to monks or priests. It became the “mantra” of ordinary human beings who sought to discipline both themselves and the environment. The idea of mastery over the environment was an important idea, which characterised capitalism. In this manner, the ethos or world-view promoted by the Protestant ethic helped to shape rational capitalism.

vi) The Future of the Rationalised Western World: The ‘Iron Cage’

As we have seen in the above discussion, Weber views rationality as a key process of western civilisation. The rationalisation of economy, polity, cultures and day-to-day existence has important implications. Rationalisation leads to disenchantment of the world. Because science seems to have answers for almost everything, human beings lose their reverence and awe for the world. Rationalisation of day-to-day life traps human beings into routines. Life becomes mechanical, predictable and systematic and hence dull. This can have the effect of making human beings less creative and reluctant to break routines and

schedules. Human beings get caught in a prison of their own making, an iron cage from which there seems to be no escape. Rational capitalism and its partner, the rational bureaucratic state, perpetuate a certain life-style in which the roles of human beings are robbed of creativity and adventure. The world around us loses its charm. It reduces humans to automatons. Basically, it is an alienative system.

We have just studied how Max Weber tried to explain the rise of the complex phenomenon known as rational capitalism. Weber did not restrict his explanation to just economic or political factors. He did not discount or neglect these factors, but he did emphasise the importance of the psychological motivations underlying the development of rational capitalism. These motivations resulted from the changing worldview. Human beings no longer viewed themselves as the passive victims of the whims of nature. They adopted an ethic of mastery or control both over the outside world and their inner selves. The message preached by Protestant sects like the Calvinist sect had a major role to play in shaping this changing world-view. The notions of pre-destination and calling made followers anxious to prosper on earth and master it. This helped to develop an economic ethic, which emphasised rational conduct of both, personal life and business, viewing work not as a burdensome necessity but a sacred duty. The notion of calling helped to build up the disciplined army of labour so necessary for capitalism to flourish. Weber's multi-layered analysis thus tries to study the growth of capitalism in terms of changing material and political conditions as well as changing values and ideas.

Weber paints a gloomy picture of the future. Rationality which reflects in economic and political structures will make life routinised and monotonous. Because human beings have explanations for almost everything, life ceases to be interesting and exciting. Human beings will thus be trapped in an iron 'cage' of their own making.

11.3.3 Comparison Between Marx and Weber

We have just examined the views of Karl Marx and Max Weber on the phenomenon known as capitalism. You will have noticed many similarities and differences in their respective approaches. Let us now very briefly try to compare their views:

i) Difference in Approach

Karl Marx, as you studied earlier, takes society as his unit of analysis. We have used the term social realism to describe this approach. In keeping with this, Marx describes capitalism as one of the historical stages through which society passes.

Weber, on the other hand, studies society in terms of meanings attributed or given by individuals to the world around them. He attempts an interpretative understanding of social phenomena. He tries to understand social reality by seeing it from the point of view of the participants in that reality. As you have studied above, he understands capitalism in terms of the psychological motivations of individuals, by interpreting their world-view and the meanings they attach to their activities.

ii) The Emergence of Capitalism

Marx sees the emergence of capitalism in terms of a shift in mode of production. To him, the economy or the material world is the infrastructure or base, which moulds the other sub-systems like culture, religion, polity and the like. So a change in the system is seen primarily as a change in economic system. The emergence of capitalism is thus explained in terms of a changed mode of production which results from the contradictions within the earlier historical stage, in this case, feudalism.

Weber's analysis is much more complex. As you have studied, he does not ignore economic factors in the emergence of rational capitalism. But to him, the problems of meanings, motivations and world-view of individuals are important. World-view, values, beliefs, sentiments help to guide action, including economic action. So, in order to understand why and how rational capitalism emerged, Weber thinks it important to understand the value system that makes it possible. His book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as you have studied earlier reflects this outlook.

Some people say that Weber's work is the exact opposite of Marx's work. They say that while Marx put economy before religion, Weber put religion before economy. This is a rather simplistic way of seeing their work. It is more appropriate to say that Weber's analysis complements that of Marx by introducing new dimensions and new angles with which to view as complex a phenomenon as capitalism.

iii) Consequences of Capitalism and Remedy for Change

For Karl Marx, capitalism symbolises exploitation, dehumanisation and alienation of the working class. It is a system based on inequality and will ultimately break down. This break-down will be brought about by its own inner contradictions. The proletariat will bring about a revolution and thus a new stage of human history, namely, communism will be born.

For Weber too, rational capitalism is basically alienating for human society. Rational capitalism and the rational bureaucratic state go hand in hand. Human life gets routinised, human beings experience disenchantment of the world. But Weber is pessimistic about the future. Unlike Marx, he does not think revolution or collapse of the system very likely. This is because rationality, the basic idea, which supports capitalism, is very necessary for all human activity in the modern world. The progress of science and technology and the human quest to gain control over nature and the world are processes that cannot be reversed. Hence revolutions and rebellions cannot fundamentally change the direction in which society is moving.

While Marx emphasises the irrationality and contradictions in capitalism, which will, according to him, lead to change, Weber speaks of its rationality. It is this very rationality however, which imprisons human beings in its iron-cage.

As we have seen above, Marx and Weber consider capitalism using different approaches. Marx studies it in terms of the historical stages which society passes through. Capitalism emerges as a result of contradictions in the earlier stage bringing about a new mode of production.

Weber too, emphasises economic factors like Marx. But his understanding of capitalism is more complex, taking into account value-systems and beliefs, in keeping with his interpretative understanding of social phenomena. Both thinkers point out that capitalism has negative consequences for human society. However, their vision of the future is very different. Marx preaches revolution and change but Weber has not such hopes.

This brings out the major point of distinction. To Marx, capitalism is rooted in irrationality, to Weber it is a reflection of rationality.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Fill in the blanks with suitable words.

- a) Marx takes as his unit of analysis. This approach is known as
- b) Weber attempted an understanding of social phenomena.
- c) Whilst Weber spoke of the rationality underlying capitalism, Marx spoke of and
- d) For Marx, the economy was the base or which shaped the

2) Briefly compare the different ways in which Marx and Weber described the emergence of capitalism.

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11.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have studied how Durkheim and Marx and Max Weber studied division of labour. We first studied the meaning of the term “division of labour”. We then studied the views of Emile Durkheim on division of labour. These views were put across in his work *Division of Labour in Society*. We then dealt with the views of Karl Marx on division of labour. We saw the difference he made between social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture. We studied the implications of division of labour in manufacture. Finally, we compared the views of Durkheim and Marx. Then we examined how Marx and Weber studied capitalism, the economic system that came into existence in their times.

We went over some of the salient points made by Marx. We saw his treatment of capitalism as a stage in human history. We described the main features of capitalism as outlined by Tom Bottomore. We saw how Marx described class polarisation which would bring about the revolution of the proletariat and the destruction of capitalism.

11.5 REFERENCES

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11.6 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Small-scale, domestic large-scale, mass
b) Division of labour
c) Adam Smith

- 2) a) F
b) F
c) T

Check Your Progress 2

- 1)
 - a) society, social realism
 - b) interpretative
 - c) irrationality, contradictions
 - d) infrastructure, superstructure

- 2) Karl Marx described the emergence of capitalism in terms of a changing mode of production. The contradictions in the previous stage, i.e. feudalism, would lead to the emergence of a new economic system, capitalism. Thus his explanation was basically an economic one. Weber, though he did not neglect the role of economic factors, also spoke of political and religious factors. He maintained that it was important to understand the psychological motivations and world-view, which made capitalism possible. Thus, Weber's description is multi-layered and more complex.



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UNIT 12 SOCIETY, CLASS AND SOLIDARITY*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Society
- 12.3 Class
- 12.4 Division of Labour and Solidarity
- 12.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.6 References
- 12.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain Marxian notion of society;
- discuss Durkheim's concept of solidarity and explain how it contributes to maintenance of social order;
- outline Weber's concept of class and rationality; and
- compare and contrast Marx's, Durkheim's and Weber's viewpoints on society, class and solidarity.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In earlier Units, you have studied the major intellectual influences on and critical ideas of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. You saw how the personal, social and political situation in which they lived and worked reflect in the way they discussed various issues. In this Unit, we will try to see the similarities and differences in the way they discussed and approached the concepts of society, class and solidarity.

12.2 SOCIETY

Both Marx and Weber view society as integrated whole. They maintained that social groups, social institutions, norms, beliefs, values and doctrines are inter-related. Both viewed individuals as part of social collectivity i.e., society. You might be reminded of the struggle between capitalist and workers at this points about which you read in Unit 3. It will interest you to learn that despite opposition between them, capitalists and workers remain bound together and do not separate out as two groups that have nothing to do with each other. According to Marx, the social organization follows from the production and exchange prevalent in a particular historical epoch. Economy constitutes the base while legal, educational, political and other institutions form the superstructure.

* written by Prof. Haribabu, E. (Retd.), Dept. of Sociology, Hyderabad

As you learnt in Unit 1, according to Marx, the basic necessity of material requirements of life make people to produce them. As they engage in the production process, individuals are compelled to enter into definite social relations. This is the basic idea of Marx's theory of society. He maintained that change in material conditions is necessarily accompanied with corresponding change in social relations. You learnt about the dynamics of change in Unit 1. Let us refer to Box 12.1 to understand how and what happens when new developments of production forces of society come in conflict with existing relations of production.

Box 12.1 Conflict between New Developments of Production Forces and Existing Relations of Production

“He says that new developments of productive forces of society come in conflict with existing relations of production. When people become conscious of the state of conflict, they wish to bring an end to it. This period of history is called by Marx the period of social revolution. The revolution brings about resolution of conflict. It means that new forces of production take roots and give rise to new relations of production. Thus, you can see that for Marx, it is the growth of new productive forces which outlines the course of human history. The productive forces are the powers society uses to produce material conditions of life. For Marx, human history is an account of development and consequences of new forces of material production. This is the reason why his view of history is given the name of historical materialism”.(ESO13, Block 2: 18-19)

In a nutshell we can say that Marx's conception of society and social order focuses on dominant modes of production. In fact, dominant modes of production are determined by social relations of productions (i.e., class relations). Class relations are exploitive in nature and are characterized by inequality and conflict. Marx's approach to the understanding of society rests not on the individual but on class inequality and class conflict. These are the root cause social tensions and instability in society.

Like Marx, Durkheim lays more emphasis on society than on the individual. There is, however, a major difference. In Marxian viewpoint, exploitation of labour and class struggle constitute the core of nature of society. Durkheim, however, views society is an entity which is independent of individuals. You might recall the discussion of on collective conscience in Unit 4. You learnt that collective conscience is different from individual's interactions among themselves. This implies that society and collective conscience prevail upon individuals. Let us complete Activity 1 at this stage.

Activity 1

In the present age of heightened individualism manifest in individual's assertions as my privacy, my rights, my space, my Adhar, my PAN, my mobile, my car etc. How can we see Durkheimian urge to nurture the foundations of 'collective conscience' or 'moral citizenship'?

In fact, according to Durkheim, the interests of the individual do not necessarily conform to those of the group to which he belongs. So that that society operates smoothly and social order is maintained, individuals need to be controlled and made to conform to the existing system. This could be done by way of making a code of rules and that individuals should follow so that collective interests are not damaged neither does society gets disorganized. The 'moral code' serves to control predominance of individuals self-interest and promote larger interest of the group. This moral discipline maintains harmony between individual and society. Weak moral discipline could lead to (i) rise in individual's ego which will threaten societal harmony and social ordering, and (ii) loosening of individuals' ties with the community at large leading to a situation of anomie.

As you read in Unit 7 Weber focused attention on *verstehen* i.e., interpretative understanding of social phenomena. Let us refer to Box 12.2 to understand what he meant by *verstehen*

Box 12.2 Verstehen or Interpretative Understanding

“Weber points out that a natural scientist’s understanding of natural phenomena is from the outside. Let us take an example. When a chemist studies the properties of a particular substance, he does so from the outside. When a sociologist tries to understand human society and culture, he approaches it as an insider, or a participant. Being human, the social scientist has access to the motives and feelings of his/her subject matter. Social scientists can understand human action by probing the subjective meanings that actors attach to their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. Sociological understanding is thus qualitatively different from that of other sciences. Sociology, in Weber’s opinion, must use the method of interpretative understanding or “*verstehen*” (which means ‘to understand’ in German). The method of *verstehen* implies that the sociologist should visualise the motivations of the actor by trying to interpret his feelings, his understanding of the situation. But is *verstehen* sufficient for sociological explanation? According to Weber, it is only the first step. The next step of analysis is causal explanation or searching for the causes or reasons behind the occurrence of any social phenomena”. (ESO-13, Block 5: 15)

According to Weber, rational organizations and institutions emerge in societies over a period of time. In fact, the older and less rational forms of society transform into newer and more rational forms. You have studied Weber’s concept of rationality and the process of rationalism in unit 7. In modern societies, rationalization is exhibited through *zweckrational* actions, i.e., actions in relation to goals. In more simple terms, social actions get more and more goal-directed. Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy are outcome of the process of rationalization to the process of rationalization tighter its grip over different aspects of society social interactions and institutions become more and more methodical, and rule-governed. When this happens excessively, efficiency increases (i.e., there is greater likelihood of getting expected outcomes) but people get a sense of disenchantment of the world.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Complete the following sentences by filling in the blank spaces.
 - i) Marx’s conception of society and social order focuses on.....
 - ii) Marx’s approach to the understanding of society rests on.....
 - iii) *Verstehen* refers to.....
- 2) Explain the role of moral code in functioning of society. Use the space below to write your answer.

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12.3 CLASS

You have read about the concept of class, class structure and class struggle from Marxian perspective in Unit 3. You will recall that formation of feudal societies was facilitated by the rulers or kings who created a class of people or lords and gave vast tracts of land to them for cultivation or gave powers to collect taxes from peasants. In return, the lords were obliged to support the king or the ruler in various ways including taking care of the armed forces and paying part of the taxes collected according to an agreement. The feudal lord organized agricultural production on the land given by king or ruler by employing serfs and peasants. In Europe the area under the control of a lord was called a manor. The feudal society, thus, was divided into classes: a) a class that owns means of production (lords) and the class that owns labour power (serfs and peasants). The serfs and peasants were required to work on the large size farms of the lord for most of the day in addition to working on small pieces of land allotted to them for their own subsistence. They did not have the freedom to move out of lord’s estate or manor.

In a capitalist society typically the classes are: a group of people who own the means of production (capitalists); and those who are endowed with labour power. Those who own the means of production constitute a class, that is, bourgeoisie and those who own their labour power and do not own the means of production constitute a class, that is, proletariat. The two classes are in antagonism or conflict with each other. At this stage, you should refer to Unit 3 for detailed discussion on class structure and class conflict. Let us now look at Weber’s notion of class following which we will draw a comparison between Marxian and Weberian perspectives on class.

Max Weber's conception of class is more or less similar to that of Marx. He defines class in terms of market situation that an individual has. In other words, one's position in the market is economically determined as a worker, owner and trader etc. Market situation determines life-chances that an individual gets. However, he does not subscribe to the idea of static polarization of classes which Marx postulated into: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. He recognized the process of differentiation of classes. He recognized the emergence of middle class and differentiation of working class into skilled, and unskilled sections in the working class. The ownership of the means of production unlike in the early capitalist society in which the enterprises were typically owner-managed and family controlled ones get distributed among several persons in the form of joint stock. The managerial class involved in organizing production exercises bureaucratic authority to oversee production (Dahrendorf 1959). Let us complete Activity 2 at this stage.

Activity 2

Do you think the polarization of the classes that Marx thought of in his times could be applicable in the context of new capitalism which has created a techno-managerial class which is neither bourgeoisie nor proletariat in the conventional sense of the term? Discuss with other learners at your study centre.

Status groups are classified on the basis of the non-economic attributes such as honour, prestige, ethnicity, race, religion caste, profession and nationalities. Members of a status group exhibit solidarity vis-à-vis other status groups. For example, people belonging to one religion share a set of beliefs about the relationship between humans and the supernatural powers, a code of conduct. These features constitute the basis of the solidarity. For example, here solidarity arises from commitment to a given set of political values and practices.

Class, status groups and parties constitute three components of social stratification system that Weber conceptualized. One of the important implications of Weber's notion of class, status groups and parties is that the stratification system divides the society into groups the position of which can be measured on an ordinal scale. For example, persons or groups may be divided into those with more or less honour and prestige. Classes can be divided into lower, middle and upper classes (on the basis of income). Political parties can be divided into those which have more or less power or influence. If a group belongs to upper class, commands more prestige and political power or influence then there is status congruence. If a group belongs to upper class and lower prestige or honour and less political influence then it is a situation of status incongruence which can be studied empirically.

According to Bendix (1974), Marx's and Weber's approach to the understanding of class differ in three respects.

First, Weber did not agree with Marx that persons belonging to the same class would come together and form associations. He treats Marx's concept of class as an 'ideal type' in the sense that it was logical construct based on observed tendencies.

Second, Weber broadens Marx's concept of class as determined solely by economic criteria. According to Weber, ownership of means of production or dependence on wage labour was important but special cases. Weber argued that apart from the criteria of ownership of land, labour or capital, there were many property classes, commercial classes, and social classes. For Weber, class situation is ultimately market situation.

Third, according to Marx, the compelling structure of capitalism makes the 'bourgeois ideologists' to form certain beliefs. These beliefs of bourgeois ideologists contribute to political radicalization of labour movement. While agreeing that readily understood goals contribute a great deal to success of class-conscious organizations of workers, Weber maintains that these goals are in fact, 'imposed and interpreted by men outside their class (intelligentsia)'.

12.4 DIVISION OF LABOUR AND SOLIDARITY

The central idea underlying the division of labour is that of splitting an activity onto smaller processes that are carried out by persons or group of persons. The objective is to enhance efficiency and complete the activity speedily. For example, if a carpenter has to make a chair. There are two options before him. The first is to make the whole chair himself. This would take quite some time.

Also, while he may be very good at making the back-rest, he may not be able to design the arm-rest very well. Just imagine if he had three co-workers. One could make the arm-rest, other could make back-rest, third could make the seat and join the three components. This would save a great deal of time and energy. An additional advantage could be that while doing the same job over and over again, the three men could develop expertise in it and perform the task well and efficiently. Consider another example of car production. Today production of a car is broken down into several tasks – procuring raw materials, engine design, fabrication of car's body and their assemblage etc. A group of engineers design the engine, a group of technicians assemble parts of the car, and a group of managers procure raw materials, oversee production and marketing. No one individual can produce an entire car from acquiring raw materials to the final stage of production Durkheim argues that the compound division of labour in modern society brings in actors under contractual obligations. For example, a car manufacturer enters into legal contract with raw material supplying firms for procuring raw materials at a certain price, the schedule of supply of raw materials and the schedule of payment of money towards the cost of raw materials. If either party violates the terms of contract then the other party can take recourse to legal action to seek justice. In this sense, the nature of division of labour in modern societies creates conditions for the emergence of organic solidarity. In other

words, division of labour and consequent organic solidarity produce certain legal and moral obligations and the system of law that is called restitutive law. It means that there are various degrees of punishment for violating the terms of contract entered into by individuals/firms.

Durkheim argues that the division of labour has a function in the society. As mentioned above, the nature of division of labour contributes to different types of social solidarity. In pre-modern societies the division of labour is not elaborate and at best it is based on what men and women were expected to do in that particular context. In other words, every individual or household was involved in doing everything in more or less the same way. They also share similar belief about nature and the supernatural. Such a division of labour and shared belief system produces mechanical solidarity or a sense of belonging. In contrast, as mentioned earlier, modern societies depend on variety of related skills and competence and consequent interdependence of functions. This leads to cooperation and interdependence among individuals and households. As mentioned in the example of making a motor car, the division of labour brings about cooperation among people with different skills to achieve the goal of making a motor car. Such a deliberately constructed social relations based on cooperation gives rise to organic solidarity. Let us refer to Box 12.3 to understand the distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity.

Box 12.3 Types of Solidarity

i) Mechanical Solidarity

“As you know, mechanical solidarity refers to a solidarity of resemblance or likeness. There exists a great deal of homogeneity and tightly-knit social bonds which serve to make the individual members one with their society. The collective conscience is extremely strong. By collective conscience we mean the system of beliefs and sentiments held in common by members of a society which defines what their mutual relations ought to be. The strength of the collective conscience integrates such societies, binding together individual members through strong beliefs and values. Violation of or deviation from these values is viewed very seriously. Harsh or repressive punishment is given to offenders. Once again, it must be pointed out that this is a solidarity or unity of likeness and homogeneity. Individual differences are extremely limited and division of labour is at a relatively simple level. Briefly, in such societies, individual conscience is merged with the collective conscience.

ii) Organic Solidarity

By organic solidarity, Durkheim means a solidarity based on difference and complementarity of differences. Take factory, for example. There is a great deal of difference in the work, social status, income, etc. of a worker and a manager. Yet, the two complement each other. Being a manager is meaningless without the cooperation of workers and workers need to be organised by managers. Thus they are vital for each other's survival.

Societies based on organic solidarity are touched and transformed by the growth of industrialisation. Thus, division of labour is a very important aspect of such societies. A society based on organic solidarity is thus one where heterogeneity, differentiation and variety exist. The growing complexity of societies reflects in personality types, relationships and problems. In such societies, the strength of the collective conscience lessens, as individual conscience becomes more and more distinct, more easily distinguished from the collective conscience. Individualism becomes increasingly valued. The kind of grip that social norms have on individuals in mechanical solidarity loosens. Individual autonomy and personal freedom become as important in organic solidarity as social solidarity and integration in societies characterised by mechanical solidarity".
(ESO 13, Block 5: 41)

Emile Durkheim was concerned with identifying the symbols of solidarity and collective conscience in the life of the communities. He argued that religion is an institution that creates a sense of moral obligation to conform to the requirements of the society and helps in internalizing these obligations. Religion divides the world into two categories: sacred and profane. The notion of sacred relates to objects that are considered superior and extraordinary and the profane refers to the ordinary things. Religion is a system of beliefs and practices about the sacred. On the basis of his study of Australian Aborigine communities, he found that their religion is optimistic. The Aborigine society is divided into clans. The first building block of solidarity is the clan. To identify oneself with the clan and to maintain loyalty to the clan, an object - tree or an animal is chosen as a symbol or a totem that represented the clan.

The totem is sacred and hence protected and venerated. A clan is an exogamous (marrying within the clan is prohibited) and a corporate group that worked together in protecting the resources of the clan and the community. The solidarity created thus, according to Durkheim, is mechanical solidarity as every household is engaged in similar kind of activities with other households. In contrast, in the case of an industrial society the community or a clan or a household as a unit of production is replaced by the individual as the unit of production thus removing the basis of shared material conditions and a system of belief and hence the solidarity based on shared material conditions and beliefs about nature and society. As the society gets differentiated in terms of occupations and skills sources of income of the members in a household are no longer the same. In modern societies the unit of production is an individual in contrast to agrarian societies where the source of income of the entire household is land. For example, in modern society among the members of a family living in the same dwelling unit or household, the father may be a teacher, mother a self-employed person and their son/daughter may be a civil servant. In this context, the material conditions of their existence and sources of income are different. If members of all the households in a society perform different roles, the basis of solidarity changes from the mechanical basis to organic basis or from a simple division of labour to a complex division of labour and this creates conditions for the one based a deliberately cultivated and mobilized solidarity that is organic solidarity.

While Marx stressed the collective identity and action in terms of class, Weber attempted to understand identity, solidarity and action in terms of more than one basis: class, status and party. Solidarity for Max Weber may depend on more than one social basis: class; status groups; and parties. You have read about these in section 12.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Complete the following sentences by filling in the blank spaces.
 - i) Weber defines class in terms of..... that an individual has
 - ii) Status groups are classified on the basis of attributes.
 - iii) According to Weber , Marx’s concept of class is an

- 2) Explain Marx’s viewpoint on consequences division of labour.
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12.5 LET US SUM UP

In earlier Units the social and political climate which influenced the important ideas of Marx, Durkheim and Weber were discussed. You studied the major contributions of Marx, Durkheim and Weber to sociology. In this Unit the objective was to familiarize you with the similarities and differences in the viewpoints of these thinkers on society, class and solidarity.

Max Weber’s conception of class is more or less similar to that of Marx. He defines class in terms of market situation that an individual has. In other words, one’s position in the market is economically determined as a worker, owner and trader etc. However, he does not subscribe to the idea of static polarization of classes which Marx postulated into: Bourgeoisie and proletariat. He recognized the process of differentiation of classes. He recognized the emergence of middle class and differentiation of working class into skilled, and unskilled sections in the working class. The ownership of the means of production unlike in the early capitalist society in which the enterprises were typically owner-managed and family controlled ones get distributed among several persons in the form of joint stock. You learnt how solidarity is manifested in society.

12.6 REFERENCES

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12.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1)
 - i) Dominant modes of production
 - ii) Class inequality and class struggle
 - iii) Interpretative understanding of society
- 2) Durkheim maintained that interests of the individual do not necessarily conform to those of the group to which he belongs. Moral code serves to impose a check on the interests of the individual and promote the larger interest of society. This enables the society to operate smoothly and maintains social order. Moral discipline maintains harmony between individual and society.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1)
 - i) Market situation
 - ii) non-economic attributes
 - iii) Ideal Type
- 2) According to Marx, division of labour is imposed on workers by capitalists. It leads to dehumanisation of the work force in the sense that their labour becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold at the market place; they are reduced to being parts of the production process; their personalities, their problems mean nothing to their employers. Further, being part of a system they cannot control and feel alienated at all levels: from their work, their fellow-workers and the social system itself.

GLOSSARY

- Affective Action** : It is that type of action, which is carried out under the sway of some sort of emotional state or condition.
- Anomie** : This term is used by Durkheim to convey a situation in which the individual does not feel integrated in society. Social norms and values seem unclear and disjointed. The individual does not feel morally involved with the affairs of society. There is breakdown of or confusion regarding group rules that regulate the behaviour of individuals. It is a state of normlessness. In such a situation, an individual does not feel integrated with or morally involved with the affairs of society.
- Assembly Line** : A feature of the modern factory system wherein workers assemble or put together the various parts of a commodity or perform certain operations on it. Each has a specific task to do. This speeds up the production.
- Authority** : When power is legitimised it becomes authority. It is the legitimate capacity of an individual/group to influence or control the behaviour of others. According to Weber, there are three types of authority: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority.
- Belief** : A statement about reality that is accepted by individuals as true and regarded as factual.
- Bourgeoisie** : Also known as 'Haves' are those people who own the means of production for example – landowners, capitalists in industrial societies.
- 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.
- Calling** : Following a profession or doing work as a sacred duty which God has 'called' an individual to do regarding work as more than just an economic necessity, but a religious duty.
- Calvinism** : One of the four main streams of Protestantism besides Methodism, Pietism and Baptism. Calvinism has three major important tenets: 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** : It is one of the historical stages of society in which the means of production (i.e., capital, labour and machinery) are privately owned.
- Cartel** : A group of industrialists who have come together to monopolise or gain complete control over the market.
- Charismatic Authority** : In this type of authority, commands are obeyed because followers believe in the extraordinary character of the leader.
- Clan** : Descent from a common ancestry; now, often applied to any group of people who count descent unilineally from a common ancestor (actual or

mythical). The ancestor in simple societies may be represented by totem such as animal, plant or sources of natural forces. Common ancestor signifies a relationship through blood. Hence, marriages within group are prohibited.

- Class** : When people share the same relationship to the means of production and also share the similar consciousness regarding their common interest, they constitute a class.
- Class-conflict** : When two classes having basic antagonism of class interests struggle or clash in order to safeguard their class interests then it is called class conflict.
- Collective Conscience** : A set of beliefs and customs, which on an average are common in a society and form a determinant system which has its own style of life. The collective conscience according to Durkheim is the body of beliefs, practices and common sentiment held throughout society and it gives social purpose and structures social life.
- 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.
- Collective** : A combined action, idea or norm formed by people interacting with each other.
- Complementary** : Something that helps, supports e.g., the role of a nurse is complementary to that of a doctor.
- Consanguinity** : The relationship of the people who are descended from one. The quality of common ancestors, commonly termed as “relationship by blood”.
- 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.
- 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.
- Dialectics** : The conflict between two mutually opposite forces or tendencies.
- Disenchantment** : It is a sense of disappointment and lack of interest in something that one has admired and/or looked up to.
- Economic structure** : Sum total of relations of production i.e., social relationships that people have to enter into for production of material conditions of life.
- Empirical** : Based on observed facts.
- Ethical prophets** : These are persons who give people a powerful message, usually a religious one. They usually call for an overthrow of an existing social order, which they be regard as evil and give their followers an alternative which they often claim has been revealed to them by god. Religions like Judaism, Islam and Christianity are ‘prophetic’ religions.

- Feudalism** : It is also one of the historical stages of society where the means of production are mainly land and labour.
- Forces of Production** : Forces of production mean the ways in which production is done; the technological 'know-how', the types of equipments in use and types of goods being produced, e.g., tools, machinery, labour, etc.
- Horde** : Small band of people related through kinship ties. They are found among nomadic hunters and food gatherers.
- 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.
- Infrastructure** : According to Marx, the materialistic structure or economic structure is the foundation or base of society. In other words, it is also called the infrastructure. The superstructure of society rests on it. Infrastructure includes mode of production and hence forces of production and relations of production.
- Labour Power** : It refers to the capacity of labour to work. This includes physical strength, skills and technical expertise).
- Legal-Rational Authority** : This involves obedience to formal rules established by regular public procedure.
- Life-Chances** : The opportunities that an individual gets during the various stages of life are referred to as life-chances. Consider the case of a labourer's son. He avails certain kind of education and learns specific skills that prepare him for a particular kind of vocation. Of course, here we are not referring to many exceptions wherein education and skills that an individual avails are different from those of his/her parents. Weber maintained that life-chances was an important aspect of class. People belonging to a class share similar life-chances. They also have similar relation to the market which is referred to as market situation.
- Lineage** : A group of kin who reckons descent from a known common ancestor, this being conducted in a single line, either exclusively through patrilineal or exclusively matrilineal.
- Market Situation** : The possibilities that exist of exchanging an object for money.
- Means of Production** : It includes all the elements necessary for production, e.g., land, raw material, factory, labour and capital, etc.
- Mode of Production** : It refers to the general economic institution i.e., the particular manner in which people produce and distribute the means that sustain life. The forces of production and the relations of production together define the mode of production. Examples of modes of production are capitalistic mode of production, feudal mode of production, etc.
- Money-economy** : Any economic transaction made in terms of money.

- 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.
- Negation** : A new stage which is a product of a qualitative change and it is a progressive change to replace the old.
- Norm** : It is a specific guide to action. It defines what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour in specific situations
- Polysegmental** : More than one segment.
- Power** : One's capacity to impose his or her will on others.
- Proletariat** : These people are also known as 'Have-nots' and these are the people who do not own any means of production except their own labour power. Hence all the landless peasants or agricultural labourers in feudal societies and industrial workers in capitalist societies are the proletariat.
- 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 organization.
- Qualitative** : Appearance of new or disappearance of old is a qualitative change.
- 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.
- Rationality /rationalization** : Rationality in Weber's usage refers to a unique trend in Western Europe. It refers to the attempt at making human life more controlled by making it methodical and regularised. Human beings no longer see themselves as victims of the environment but as masters or controllers of it.
- Relations of Production** : According to Marx, the forces of production shape the nature of the 'relations of production'. These are, in fact, the social relations found in production i.e., economic roles, e.g., labourer, landowner, capitalist, etc.
- Repressive Law** : Law that punishes the wrong-doer to establish the power and authority of the group or the collectivity. The most prevalent type of law in simple societies.
- Restitutive Law** : Law which appears no longer a law for punishment but for restitution or reform. Its function is not to expiate but rather to restore to the rightful person what he or she has lost e.g. an amount of money given on loan or a house given on rent.
- Revolution** : It is the sudden, total and radical change in society brought in by the matured conditions of class conflict.
- Routinisation** : A process of transformation of the charismatic authority either into traditional or rational legal authority.
- Sacred and** : The two polar opposites into which the world is divided, according to Durkheim. The 'sacred' refers to holy, pure, superior things; the 'profane'

- profane** : refers to ordinary, mundane ones.
- Sanction** : Reward or punishment to enforce norm. Former is called positive sanction, the latter negative sanction.
- Social Solidarity** : The condition within the group in which there is social cohesion and cooperation, and the collective action is directed towards the achievement of group goals and in which social organisation is shown by permanency. These conditions are changeable according to the social conditions. That is why Durkheim proposes two types of solidarity (mechanical and organic).
- Socialisation** : The process by which individuals learn the culture of their society.
- Solidarity** : It refers to the condition of overall unity, social cohesion and cooperation in society.
- Status Group** : It refers to a group of people who share common status situation. Status situation of a person is refers to the evaluation that other people make of him/her and of his/her social position. Unlike class, people who belong to a particular status group are conscious of their common position. Often, status groups exhibit their distinctiveness by adopting a particular lifestyle and manner of interaction with others.
- Sui generis** : That which generates itself; that which exists by itself; that which does not depend upon some other being for its origin or existence. Durkheim considered society as sui generis. It is always present and has no point of origin.
- Superstructure** : According to Marx, all institutions other than economic institutions constitute superstructure of a society. All social, political and cultural institutions of societies excepting economic institutions constitute the superstructure of a society.
- Totemism** : A religion in which an animal, plant or some object is held as sacred and from which the group claims descent.

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