

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION

MA Sociology – I Semester

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CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION

Course Objective

This course is designed to acquaint students with the thought of the founders of sociology. It is intended to give students grounding in sociological theory that they can carry over and apply to all other courses on society.

Unit I

The Rise of Sociology in the 19th century: The Positivism of August Comte

Unit II

Karl Marx: Historical Materialism; Surplus Value; Alienation of labour; and Class Conflict.

Unit III

Emile Durkheim: The Division of Labour; Rules of Sociological Method; Religion and Society; Study of Suicide

Unit IV

Max Weber: Social Action; Types of Authority, Verstehen, Bureaucracy, World Religions and Western Capitalism

Unit V

Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim: Methodology: Marx, Weber and Durkheim; Religion: Durkheim and Weber; Capitalism: Marx and Weber **References:**

Readings:

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UNIT – I

The Rise of Sociology in the 19th century

Introduction

The nineteenth century saw the birth of sociology as an independent academic field, dedicated to the scientific study of society. Amongst the founders of this new discipline, Auguste Comte (1798-1857) occupies a special position and is known as the Father of Sociology. Auguste Comte assumed that the same as natural sciences revealed the laws of the physical world, the society could also be studied scientifically in order to understand the laws of social order and social change. His positivist philosophy brought the study of society from mere philosophical speculations to scientific research and created the methodological base for the development of sociology as an independent discipline.

This unit will consider the life, intellectual context, and the main theoretical ideas of Comte. It will discuss his philosophy of positivism, law of three stages, hierarchy of sciences, social statics and dynamics. This unit will also evaluate Comte's contribution, limitations, and relevance for contemporary sociological thought. While many aspects of Comte's theory have been criticized and corrected by modern sociologists, his idea about sociology as a scientific discipline remains an important influence on the development of sociological knowledge.

Objectives

After learning this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the life and intellectual background of Auguste Comte.
- Discuss the development and principles of positivism.
- Examine the main writings of Comte and their significance.
- Describe the Law of Three Stages.
- Explain the Hierarchy of Sciences.
- Distinguish Social Statics and Social Dynamics.
- Evaluate Comte's contribution to the development of sociology.
- Critically assess the limitations of Comte's sociological theory.
- Evaluate the relevance of positivism.

Unit Structure

Lesson 1.1 Auguste Comte: Life, Intellectual Background and the Development of Positivism

Lesson 1.2 The Law of Three Stages

Lesson 1.3 Positivism and the Hierarchy of Sciences

Lesson 1.4 Social Statics, Social Dynamics, Contributions, Criticisms and Contemporary Relevance

Lesson 1.1 - Auguste Comte: Life, Intellectual Background

Structure

- 1.1.1 Objectives
- 1.1.2 Introduction
- 1.1.3 Life and time of Auguste Comte
- 1.1.4 Intellectual Background of Comte's Thought
- 1.1.5 Auguste Comte and the genesis of Sociology
- 1.1.6 Major Works of Auguste Comte
- 1.1.7 Development of Positivism
- 1.1.8 Characteristics of Positivism
- 1.1.9 Relevance of Positivism in Sociology
- 1.1.10 Let us sum up
- 1.1.11 Keywords
- 1.1.12 Self-Assessment Questions

1.1.1 Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the life and intellectual development of Auguste Comte.
- Explain the historical circumstances that influenced Comte's ideas.
- Discuss Comte's contribution to the establishment of sociology.
- Identify Comte's major works.
- Explain the meaning and characteristics of Positivism.
- Examine the significance of Positivism in the development of sociological theory.

1.1.2 Introduction

The history of sociology is closely connected with the work of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the founder of sociology. Although many philosophers had reflected on society and social relations before him, Auguste Comte advocated that society could be studied with the same scientific principles that constitute the natural sciences. He was sure that the phenomena in society are controlled by certain laws which could be discovered through scientific observations and analysis.

Comte's ideas emerged in response to significant changes in politics, economy, and intellectual life in Europe. Traditional systems of monarchy, religion, and feudalism were questioned by the development of industry, scientific discoveries, and the emergence of democratic ideas. Faced with the disorder in society, Comte decided to discover the science which would identify the laws of society and social reconstruction. His positivist philosophy became the basis for the establishment of sociology as an independent discipline. This lesson will cover the life, intellectual context, main work of Comte and development of his positivist philosophy which became one of the earliest approaches in sociological discourse.

1.1.3 Life and time of Auguste Comte

Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte was born on 19 January 1798 in Montpellier, France in the conservative catholic family. The ideas of his parents were royalist and religious, but he started to question the traditional beliefs and political ideology. He became interested in science and social reform.

He was a brilliant student; he studied in the famous school École Polytechnique in Paris, which was the centre of science and mathematics in France. The ideas of science and logic deeply affected his philosophical ideas. Despite the fact that the political situation interrupted his studies, he continued his intellectual work independently.

One of the most significant factors in the formation of Comte's philosophical ideas was his contact with the French social reformer Henri de Saint-Simon. Being Saint-Simon's assistant and collaborator, Comte got acquainted with the ideas of industrial society, science planning, and social reconstruction. Even though they quarreled and ceased their collaboration, many scholars believe that the ideas of Saint-Simon regarding science and social organization influenced greatly the formation of Comte's philosophical ideas.

After he departed from Saint-Simon, Comte began to develop a complete philosophical system based on the scientific study of society. Despite the fact that he experienced financial difficulties, bad health, and some periods of mental instability, he kept working throughout his life. The final years of his life were spent in his attempts to create the "Religion of Humanity", a system of ethics replacing the traditional religion. Comte died in Paris on 5 September 1857, leaving a great legacy of works which made a fundamental contribution to the development of sociology as a distinct discipline.

Table 1.1.1 Life and Major Events of Auguste Comte

Year	Event
1798	Born in Montpellier, France
1814	Entered the École Polytechnique
1817–1824	Worked with Henri de Saint-Simon
1830	Published the first volume of Course of Positive Philosophy
1838	Introduced the term “sociology”
1851–1854	Published System of Positive Polity
1857	Died in Paris

1.1.4 Intellectual Background of Comte’s Thought

Comte’s sociological theories were not formulated in a vacuum. They were influenced by intellectual traditions and events in the nineteenth century Europe.

Influence of the Scientific Revolution

The brilliant successes of Galileo, Newton, and Copernicus showed that nature follows certain laws which can be revealed through observation and experimentation. Comte believed that society can be studied with the same scientific principles.

Influence of the Enlightenment

Enlightenment emphasized the role of reason, logical thinking, and human progress. Philosophers like Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Condorcet believed that the society should be understood rationally, without superstitions and religious dogmas. Comte inherited the faith in human reason while suggesting the more systematic scientific approach.

Influence of the French Revolution

The French revolution changed the French society, but also led to political disorder and violence. Comte viewed this disorder as an emergent necessity of studying the society scientifically rather than ideologically. He believed that sociology would bring back social order and promote social progress.

Influence of the Industrial Revolution

Industrialization changed the economic production, the city life, family relations and class structure. New social problems like poverty, unemployment, labor unrest, and urban overcrowding emerged. Comte recognized that these rapidly changing conditions need to be investigated scientifically.

Influence of Saint-Simon

Henri de Saint-Simon declared that scientists and industrial leaders rather than monarchs and priests should rule society. Although some ideas were later rejected by Comte, the influence of Saint-Simon on him is evident in his perception about scientific knowledge as an instrument of social reforms.

1.1.5 Auguste Comte and the genesis of Sociology

Prior to Comte, society was studied mostly within philosophy, politics, history and religion. Those disciplines were based either on speculations or on moral reasoning, not on rational principles. Comte strived to create a new scientific discipline.

In his early writings, Comte called this new science Social Physics. However, since Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet used the same term for statistical investigations, Comte proposed the term Sociology in 1838. This word consists of two root words viz. Latin socius (companion or society) and Greek logos (study or science). Thus, sociology connotes the scientific study of society.

According to Comte, sociology should discover the laws of social order and social change similar to physics, which describes the laws of physical world. Sociology, according to Comte, sociology would become the high order science, as it will combine the results of all other sciences in the study of the most complex phenomenon i.e. human society.

1.1.6 Major Works of Auguste Comte

Comte's theoretical contributions are reflected in several books.

Course of Positive Philosophy (1830-1842)

It is the major contribution of Comte, in which he introduces Positivism, hierarchy of sciences, and Law of Three Stages. Also it officially declares sociology as a distinct scientific discipline.

A General View of Positivism (1848)

This book gives the description of Comte's philosophy and discusses the practical applications of Positivism for the organisation of society.

System of Positive Polity (1851-1854)

In this book Comte expands Positivism into a philosophy of social and moral relations. The "Religion of Humanity" is proposed as a secular system to ensure moral unity and cohesion of society.

1.1.7 Development of Positivism

The word Positivism is derived from the word positive, which means factual, observable and scientifically provable. According to Comte, any true knowledge is based only on empiricism, not on speculation or theological beliefs. As it is said in Positivism, knowledge develops through observation, comparison, classification, and discovery of causal relations. In scientific researches the ultimate purpose is not only description of phenomena but finding the laws that control them.

Comte suggested that sociology should use the same methods that were successfully applied to the study of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology. With the help of those methods sociology would be able to explain social order, predict social changes and promote social development. For Comte the purpose of Positivism was both theoretical and practical and therefore scientific knowledge should be used to solve social problems, reduce conflicts and improve human life.

1.1.8 Features of Positivism

Comte's Positivism has the following features.

Scientific Orientation: knowledge should be based on observations;

Objectivity: the researchers should not bring their beliefs, feelings and values to the study of society;

Search for Laws: the social phenomena are controlled by laws which can be scientifically discovered;

Observation and Verification: facts should be verified through observation, not accepted as a matter of authority or tradition;

Prediction: scientific knowledge allows anticipating future developments;

Practical Application: scientific knowledge should serve for social reform and development.

Table 1.1.2 Main Features of Positivism

Feature	Explanation
Empirical	Based on observable facts
Scientific	Uses systematic methods
Objective	Minimises personal bias
Law-seeking	Identifies general social laws
Verifiable	Conclusions are based on evidence
Practical	Aims to improve society through scientific knowledge

1.1.9 Relevance of Positivism in Sociology

Positivism is one of the first systematic approaches to the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline. The insistence of Comte on empiricism inspired sociologists to go beyond speculations and develop the systematic methods for social phenomena investigation.

Later sociologists adopted some aspects of Positivism, changing the others. For example, Émile Durkheim agreed with Comte that sociology should be a science, although he developed the stricter methodology. The modern quantitative sociology, survey research, statistical analysis, demography and evidence-based public policy are all the products of positivist approach.

Nevertheless, Positivism has raised many controversies. Interpretative sociologists like Max Weber emphasized the importance of understanding of meanings and subjective experiences in the explanation of social behaviour. Thus, Positivism is both a key approach and an object of criticism in sociology.

1.1.10 Let Us Sum Up

Auguste Comte plays the central role in the history of sociology as the founder of the discipline and pioneer of Positivism. The vision of Comte was to create the science of sociology that would be able to discover the laws of society, similar to the natural sciences, which describe physical world. Influenced by Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, French Revolution, industrialisation and ideas of Saint-Simon, Comte created the systematic approach to the study of society through observation and scientific reasoning. Comte introduced the term sociology in 1838 and

insisted on the objective and empirical approach to the investigation of social phenomena. The works of Comte, especially *Course of Positive Philosophy* and *System of Positive Polity*, became the foundation of classical sociological theory. Through Positivism, he emphasized the importance of objectivity, empirical observation, scientific verification and search for universal laws that govern social life. Despite many criticisms of Comte's theory made by later sociologists, the contribution of Comte to the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline remains unique.

1.1.11 Keywords

Positivism, Social Physics, Empirical Observation, Objectivity, Saint-Simon, Enlightenment, Polity, Religion of Humanity

1.1.12 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the life and intellectual background of Auguste Comte.
2. Explain Auguste Comte's contribution to the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline.
3. Critically examine the philosophy of Positivism.
4. Evaluate the significance of Comte's major works in the development of sociological thought.
5. Assess the contemporary relevance of Positivism in sociological research.

Lesson 1.2 - The Law of Three Stages

Structure

- 1.2.1 Objectives
- 1.2.2 Introduction
- 1.2.3 Concept and Nature of the Law of Three Stages
- 1.2.4 The Theological Stage
- 1.2.5 The Metaphysical Stage
- 1.2.6 The Positive Stage
- 1.2.7 Critical evaluation of the Law of Three Stages
- 1.2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.2.9 Keywords
- 1.2.10 Self-Assessment Questions

1.2.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages;
- describe the characteristics of the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages;
- compare the three stages of intellectual development;
- examine the significance of the Law of Three Stages in sociological thought; and
- critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of Comte's theory

1.2.2 Introduction

Among several contributions of Auguste Comte to sociology, the Law of Three Stages has great significance. This is the first attempt made by a sociologist to explain the process of development of human knowledge and the effects of the development of human intellect on the development of society. According to Comte, human civilisation is directly proportional to the development of human thought process. The more scientific is the development of human knowledge, the more organised and progressive becomes society.

The Law of Three Stages forms the philosophical basis of the theory of social evolution of Comte. Comte postulates in this theory that each

branch of human knowledge, every society and even human mind passes through three successive stages of intellectual development. These are namely Theological Stage, Metaphysical Stage and Positive Stage. These three stages reflect three different ways of explanation of the phenomena of nature and society. Comte considers the process universal and inevitable. Ultimately the process culminates into the scientific explanation of society.

The Law of Three Stages is intimately connected with the philosophy of Positivism of Comte which would be discussed in the next lesson. While the philosophy of Positivism explains the methodology of studying society scientifically, the Law of Three Stages explains how humanity arrived at scientific thought.

1.2.3 the Law of Three Stages

The Law of Three Stages explains the process of development of human intellect. Comte holds that human beings have always been trying to understand their surroundings. But the explanations offered by them depend upon the level of knowledge. According to Comte, the human thought process evolves from supernatural explanations to abstract philosophical reasoning to finally scientific investigation.

According to Comte, the development of human knowledge is not a random or haphazard process. It has certain sequence in which one stage follows other stage. All the major branches of human knowledge such as Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Sociology etc. pass through these three stages before becoming scientific.

The law is applicable not only to the sciences but also to the intellectual development of the individuals and societies. The child believes in the explanations based on the authority and imagination, the adolescent questions the things and reasons philosophically, while the adult thinks and investigates rationally. Similarly, the civilization proceeds from the religious explanations to philosophical speculations and finally to the scientific explanations.

Comte holds that the intellectual evolution leads to the development of social institutions, political structure, education and culture of the society. The higher the development of society, the better is its capacity to achieve social order and progress.

The three stages suggested by Comte are as follows:

- Theological Stage
- Metaphysical Stage
- Positive Stage

These three stages refer to the different modes of thinking and not to any particular period of history. Although one stage may dominate over others in any age, but the traces of past stages can coexist with the more advanced stages of thought.

Table 1.2.1: The Three Stages of Intellectual Development

Stage	Basis of Explanation	Dominant Method
Theological	Supernatural beings	Faith and imagination
Metaphysical	Abstract principles	Philosophical reasoning
Positive	Scientific laws	Observation and empirical investigation

1.2.4 The Theological Stage

The Theological Stage is the earliest stage of the development of human intellect. At this stage people explain all the natural and social phenomena on the ground of actions of supernatural beings, spirits or divine powers. The human intellect is controlled by imagination, religion and faith and not by science. According to Comte, the primitive societies did not have enough knowledge of sciences to explain the natural phenomena like rain, earthquake, diseases, floods, eclipse or even death. Therefore, the primitive societies attributed these phenomena to the will of the supernatural powers.

According to Comte, this stage is essential as it is the first systematic attempt made by human beings to understand the world. Even if these explanations were not scientific, they gave psychological safety and social unity to the primitive societies. Comte further classifies the theological stage into three sub-stages or successive phases.

Fetishism: Fetishism is the earliest religion. At this stage the people attribute life and supernatural powers to the natural objects like trees, rivers, mountains, stones and animals. The natural objects are worshipped as they have spiritual powers. Many primitive societies used to practice fetishism by worshipping particular trees, stones and rivers as sacred objects.

Polytheism: With the advancement of societies, the belief in spirits associated with individual objects was gradually replaced by the belief in multiple Gods, in which every God was responsible for certain phenomenon of nature and human life. For instance, there were separate Gods of rain, agriculture, war, fertility and sea in ancient civilizations. The religions of ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians are the examples of this stage.

Monotheism: The last phase of the theological stage is Monotheism which means the belief in one supreme God who governs the whole universe. According to Comte, monotheism is an advanced form of religious thought as it replaces multiple agents with one God who maintains the order in the whole universe.

Table 1.2.2: Sub-Stages of the Theological Stage

Sub-stage	Main Characteristic	Illustration
Fetishism	Worship of natural objects	Sacred trees, rivers and mountains
Polytheism	Belief in many gods	Ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian religions
Monotheism	Belief in one supreme God	Islam, Christianity and Judaism

1.2.5 The Metaphysical Stage

The Metaphysical Stage is the transition stage between theology and science. At this stage, the supernatural explanations are replaced by the abstract philosophical concepts. Instead of attributing events to the gods and spirits, the people explain these through the ideas like Nature, Reason, Natural Rights, Justice, Universal Forces etc. Although these explanations are more rational than the religious explanations, they are not scientific as these do not depend upon the observation or verification of the facts.

For instance, instead of believing that rainfall takes place as a result of happiness of rain God, the thinkers at the metaphysical stage may think that rainfall is due to the “forces of Nature”. Though it is a less religious way of explanation but it still does not explain the scientific process of atmospheric phenomena.

According to Comte, the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment were the representatives of this stage. These philosophers challenged the religious authority and advocated rationality, individual rights and philosophical thought. But according to Comte, they failed to get rid of speculative way of thinking. Thus the metaphysical stage plays a significant role in history as it prepares the mind of human being for scientific investigation.

1.2.6 The Positive Stage

The Positive Stage represents the highest level of intellectual development. During the Positive Stage, human beings abandon both

supernatural and speculative beliefs and turn to explanations based on scientific observations and reasoning.

Comte upheld that science should not try to answer ultimate questions concerning the origins and purposes of the universe. Instead, it has to identify the laws of the natural and social phenomena. Scientific knowledge has to be obtained through the following process:

- observations;
- comparisons;
- classification;
- historical analysis; and
- empirical verification.

The aim of such approaches is the establishment of regularities and causal relations which would help to explain and predict the phenomena.

Comte opined that sociology had reached the Positive Stage, as it studies society using the scientific method, rather than philosophy or theology. A sociologist studying crime, for example, would study measurable factors such as level of education, poverty, unemployment, family situation, social inequality, etc., but never would say that people commit crimes under supernatural influence.

The same concerns infectious diseases which can be explained by microbiology, environment, and public health practices, rather than being considered divine punishment.

The Positive Stage does not imply rejection of religion but considers scientific knowledge as the most reliable method to understand society and nature.

Table 1.2.3: Comparing the Three Stages

Aspect	Theological	Metaphysical	Positive
Explanation	Supernatural beings	Abstract concepts	Scientific laws
Method	Faith	Philosophy	Observation and evidence
Nature of knowledge	Religious	Speculative	Empirical
Dominant institution	Religion	Philosophy	Science
Objective	Explain divine causes	Explain abstract causes	Discover scientific laws

1.2.7 Critical evaluation of the Law of Three Stages

The Law of Three Stages is one of the earliest examples of the theory of intellectual and social development. The key significance of the theory rests in the fact that human knowledge develops in time and that scientific thinking is one of the most advanced stages in this development. Moreover, the emphasis on scientific inquiry helped to reinforce the claim that sociology is an independent science capable of explaining social order and social changes.

The theory also laid the ground for the connection between the development of knowledge and the development of society. Comte maintained that the progress of knowledge influences political institutions, education, religion, and social organization in general. The idea encouraged later sociologists to see society as a dynamic system. However, the theory faced several criticisms.

At the outset, the theory assumed that all societies follow the same path of development. In contrast, Modern sociologists claim that each society has its own historical path and, therefore, cannot be explained in terms of a universal scheme of development. The second criticism is connected with the fact that the three stages are often present in one society. Even highly advanced societies have theological beliefs, philosophical reasoning, and scientific thinking simultaneously. The third criticism concerns underestimation of the role of economic, political, and cultural factors in the process of social development. Such thinkers as Karl Marx and Max Weber showed later that historical changes cannot be explained only in terms of intellectual evolution. Finally, critics find the theory too optimistic as it presents scientific knowledge as the highest and final stage of development. Scientific knowledge itself evolves and remains subject to revisions.

Despite all the criticism, Nonetheless, Comte's ideas still remain one of the fundamental theories of classical sociology because it laid the ground for the perception that social and intellectual development has its patterns and that society can be studied scientifically.

1.2.8 Let Us Sum Up

The Law of Three Stages constitutes one of Auguste Comte's most influential contributions to sociological theory. It explains the evolution of human thought through three successive stages — the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages. Each stage represents a different mode of

explaining natural and social phenomena, progressing from supernatural beliefs to philosophical speculation and finally to scientific investigation.

The theological stage is characterised by faith and belief in divine powers, while the metaphysical stage replaces these explanations with abstract concepts. The positive stage marks the triumph of scientific reasoning, observation, and empirical investigation. Comte believed that sociology belongs to this final stage because it seeks to discover the laws governing society through scientific method.

Although the theory has been criticised for its evolutionary assumptions and oversimplification of historical development, it remains a landmark in the history of sociology. It established the intellectual foundation for Positivism and reinforced the idea that the scientific study of society is both possible and necessary.

1.2.9 Keywords

Intellectual Evolution, Theological Stage, Fetishism, Polytheism, Monotheism, Metaphysical Stage, Scientific Sociology, Intellectual Development.

1.2.10 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages and discuss its importance in the development of sociological thought.
2. Describe the characteristics of the theological stage and explain its three sub-stages with suitable examples.
3. Compare the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages proposed by Auguste Comte.
4. Discuss the significance of the positive stage in Comte's philosophy of science and society.
5. Critically examine the major strengths and limitations of the Law of Three Stages.

Lesson 1.3 - Positivism and the Hierarchy of Sciences

Structure

- 1.3.1 Objectives
- 1.3.2 Introduction
- 1.3.3 Concept and Principles of Positivism
- 1.3.4 Methods of Positivism
- 1.3.5 Hierarchy of Sciences
- 1.3.6 Critical evaluation of Positivism
- 1.3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.3.8 Keywords
- 1.3.9 Self-Assessment Questions

1.3.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning and principles of Positivism;
- discuss the scientific methods advocated by Auguste Comte;
- describe Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences;
- explain why sociology occupies the highest position among the sciences; and
- critically evaluate the significance and limitations of Positivism.

1.3.2 Introduction

The theory of Positivism is the basic foundation of Auguste Comte's sociological thought. the law of three stages that human knowledge tends towards scientific reasoning, Comte strove to define the principles that society should be studied in a scientific manner. He stated that the social phenomena are governed by objective laws just as natural phenomena are. Therefore, sociology should use methods that are similar to those used in natural sciences.

One of the key features of Comte's positivist thought is his Hierarchy of Sciences. He claimed that the sciences developed in a certain order, from the simplest field of knowledge to the most complex one. Every science

depends on the preceding ones and contributes to the development of the following ones that study more complex phenomena. Sociology, which studies the most complex phenomenon – human society – takes the highest place in this hierarchy. This lesson analyses the notion of Positivism, the scientific methods suggested by Comte, his system of classification of sciences and the importance of his positivist philosophy.

1.3.3 Concept and Principles of Positivism

Positivism is a philosophical approach based on the idea that real knowledge is gained through observation, experience and scientific investigation. According to Comte, scientific knowledge is different from religious or philosophical thinking in its reliance on facts that can be observed, verified and analyzed scientifically.

Comte suggested that sociology should be based on the principles that have allowed natural sciences to explain the world of nature. Instead of seeking ultimate or supernatural causes, sociology should find out regularities and laws that govern social phenomena.

Positivism is based on the following principles.

Empirical observation: Knowledge should be based on observable facts. Scientific investigation starts with observing social phenomena instead of imaginary thoughts.

Objectivity: Researchers should avoid letting personal beliefs, political views and religious principles affect scientific investigation.

Search for laws: Scientific investigation aims at discovering universal laws that govern natural and social phenomena. Comte believed that society functions according to certain laws that should be discovered.

Verification: Scientific findings should be based on empirical evidence and should be verifiable by other researchers.

Prediction: Once laws are discovered, they allow explaining and predicting further development of society. Such knowledge helps society to deal with social problems.

Social reform: Contrary to theoretical philosophy, Positivism seeks practical implementation. Comte believed that sociology should help preserve social order and promote social progress.

Table 1.3.1 Fundamental Principles of Positivism

Principle	Description
Empiricism	Knowledge is based on observation and evidence.
Objectivity	Personal bias should be excluded from scientific investigation.
Verification	Conclusions should be supported by evidence.
Scientific laws	Society operates according to certain laws.
Prediction	Scientific knowledge makes it possible to make predictions.
Social reform	Sociology should contribute to social progress.

Positivism as a Scientific Methodology

Positivism is a methodological approach to scientific investigation of society. Comte suggested that sociology should use systematic methods for studying, analysing and interpreting social facts. The goal of sociological investigation is to find regularities in social life and develop general laws that would allow explaining social phenomena. According to Comte, scientific investigation starts with observing facts. Facts are then classified, compared and analysed for identifying patterns and causal connections. Conclusions should be based on empirical evidence, not on intuitions, speculation or personal opinions. Scientific knowledge is considered reliable only if it is based on observable evidence and can be verified in repeated investigations.

Positivism also stresses the value neutrality in research. Sociologists should try to exclude their personal biases, ideological commitments and emotional involvement while doing research. Even though absolute objectivity cannot always be achieved, positivist tradition claims that scientists should distinguish between personal opinions and scientific investigation.

Another feature of positivist methodology is the search for causal explanation. Social phenomena are supposed to occur according to certain laws, not by chance. By discovering these laws, sociology can explain social behavior, make predictions and help in making public policies and social planning. Thus, Positivism turned sociology into an empirical scientific discipline, principles of which are being used in quantitative social research.

1.3.4 Methods of Positivism

Comte suggested that sociology should use scientific methods that are adequate to investigate society. Even though laboratory experiments are often impossible in social investigation, scientific investigation remains possible using certain systematic approaches.

Observation: Observation is the basis of scientific investigation. Social facts should be investigated carefully and objectively, without any prejudices. However, Comte emphasized that observation by itself is not sufficient if it is not guided by theoretical insight. For example, a sociologist who studies urban poverty should collect factual data about income, employment, housing, education and demographics.

Comparison: Comparative analysis allows sociologists to reveal similarities and differences between various societies, institutions, or eras. With the help of comparison, one may reveal patterns that would otherwise remain invisible if one were to study just one society. The comparative analysis of educational systems in different countries may show what leads to illiteracy and educational inequality.

Historical Method: Historical method considers the evolution of societies over time. Comte thought that some social phenomena can be fully understood only through historical analysis. Analysis of family, religion, law, politics usually requires the use of historical method in order to understand the current form of such social institution.

Experimentation: In sociology direct experimentation is impossible due to the unsuitability to manipulate whole societies within laboratory conditions. However, Comte noticed that sometimes some social events such as reforms, revolutions or natural disasters act like natural experiments that demonstrate the results of particular social conditions.

Table 1.3.2 Sociological Methods Proposed by Comte

Method	Purpose
Observation	Collection of empirical facts
Comparison	Identification of similarities and differences
Historical method	Understanding long-term social evolution
Experiment	Study of social change under exceptional conditions

1.3.5 Hierarchy of Sciences

The most original contribution made by Comte to sociological theory is a classification of sciences depending on their logical and historical development. According to Comte each science evolves in a certain sequence, starting from the simplest ones and moving to increasingly complex ones. As Comte states each science depends upon the knowledge that was gained from other sciences preceding it. However, each science also possesses its own subject matter and method.

Comte presented the hierarchy of sciences in The following order:

- Mathematics
- Astronomy
- Physics
- Chemistry
- Biology
- Sociology

The Logic of Hierarchy of Sciences

The order of sciences proposed by Comte was not accidental. Comte thought that scientific knowledge evolves in accordance with a definite logical sequence from simplest to complex forms of inquiry. Sciences that deal with relatively simple and general phenomena evolve first because it is easier to investigate and formulate laws concerning them. More complex sciences evolve later because they require the use of knowledge, concepts and discoveries of simpler sciences.

Accordingly, each science has a special place in this hierarchy. Mathematics provides a logical language used by other sciences. Astronomy is dependent upon mathematics but deals with complex physical phenomena. Physics, chemistry and biology gradually consider increasing complexity of matter and life. Finally, sociology deals with the most complex phenomena viz. society, and is positioned last in the hierarchy because social phenomena have biological, psychological, economic, political, cultural and historical aspects at the same time.

Hierarchy, therefore, reflects both historical development and logical interdependence. Each science uses the knowledge obtained by previous sciences but has its own subject matter and methods. Comte did not intend to state that one science is more valuable than another; he only stated that

the complexity of the subject matter increases with the increase of position in the hierarchy.

Mathematics: Mathematics occupies the lowest position because it provides the logical language needed by other sciences. It deals with the simplest and most general relations.

Astronomy: Astronomy deals with celestial bodies whose behaviour is relatively simple and not affected by human interference. This science was among the first to evolve systematic laws based on observations.

Physics: Physics investigates matter, energy, motion and the laws of the physical world. Physics uses mathematical knowledge while investigating the phenomena that are more complex.

Chemistry: Chemistry studies the composition, structure and transformation of substances. Chemical processes are more complex than physical phenomena because they are the result of interaction between different elements.

Biology: Biology studies living organisms. Living systems possess such features as growth, reproduction, adaptation and evolution that make them more complex than non-living matter.

Sociology: Sociology occupies the highest position because it studies the most complex human society. Social life possesses biological, psychological, economic, political, cultural and historical aspects. Therefore, sociology uses the knowledge from all sciences before it while developing its own methods. Sociology was considered by Comte as the Queen of Sciences, that integrates the knowledge of all other sciences in the investigation of the functioning and evolution of human society.

Table 1.3.3 Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences

Order	Science	Subject Matter
1	Mathematics	Numbers, measurement and logical relationships
2	Astronomy	Celestial bodies and planetary motion
3	Physics	Matter, motion and energy
4	Chemistry	Composition and transformation of substances
5	Biology	Living organisms
6	Sociology	Human society and social relationships

Why Sociology is at the apex of the hierarchy of Sciences?

According to Comte, sociology occupies the highest position amongst science by virtue of the following:

- studies the most complex phenomena;
- depends upon knowledge that was obtained by the preceding sciences;
- integrates insights from various disciplines;
- seeks to discover the laws of social order and social evolution; and
- contributes directly to the improvement of society.

Therefore, sociology represents the culmination of scientific evolution.

The Significance of Hierarchy of Sciences

Hierarchy of Sciences by Comte is one of the systematic classification of human knowledge. It showed that scientific disciplines are interconnected and progress in one branch of knowledge facilitates progress in others. The classification also showed the interdisciplinary nature of sociology that benefits from advances in mathematics, biology, chemistry and other sciences.

The classification strengthened Comte's claim about the need to recognize sociology as an independent scientific discipline. Placing sociology as the culmination of the scientific development, he emphasized that the scientific investigation of society is both possible and necessary. Although contemporary science does not accept a rigid classification of disciplines anymore, Comte's classification remains historically significant because it shows the transition from speculative philosophy to scientific thinking.

1.3.6 Critical evaluation of Positivism

Positivism occupies the foundational position in the history of sociology because it provides the basis for the scientific investigation of social phenomena. Comte argued that social phenomena must be investigated with the same objectivity, systematic observation and empirical verifications that characterizes natural sciences. Principles of methodology of Comte encouraged sociologists to abandon speculation and provided the foundation for the empirical research.

The influence of positivism extended far beyond classical sociology. Modern quantitative methods such as surveys, censuses, statistical

modeling, demography, public opinion research and evidence-based policy evaluation incorporate many methodological principles formulated by Comte. Although these methods have evolved considerably, their emphasis on systematic data collection and empirical analysis continues to reflect the positivist approach.

The hierarchy of sciences revealed the logical relation between sciences and also demonstrated that sociology is a very interdisciplinary science. Nevertheless, Positivism has been criticized for several reasons. Critics claim that it is impossible to investigate society the same way as it is for the nature because people have consciousness, will, feelings and values. Contrary to natural objects, humans interpret their social reality.

Interpretative sociologists and especially Weber insisted that for explanation of social behaviour it is necessary to understand subjective meanings of people's actions. Also Karl Popper argued that the progress of science does not happen only due to observation but falsification is very important. Another criticism concerns Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences is that contemporary scholars argue that sciences do not evolve in a linear way and there is no any science that is higher than others. The interdisciplinary approach is more characteristic for contemporary scientific research.

Positivism in Contemporary Sociology

While contemporary sociology is characterized by diversity of methodologies and theoretical perspectives, Positivism is still one of the dominant traditions of the discipline. Large scale surveys, censuses, demography, social indicators, statistics and other forms of quantitative data are indispensable for studying educational attainment, health, migration, employment, poverty, crime and social inequalities. Contemporary governments, international organisations and research institutes use empirical data for making decisions and evaluating development programs.

But at the same time, sociologists understand that quantitative evidence is not sufficient for explanation of human behaviour. Interpretative, phenomenological, feminist and critical researches supplement positivist studies by investigation of meanings, identities, values and subjective experiences of people. Thus, Positivism is not considered to be the only legitimate perspective of the sociological knowledge, but one of the important methodological traditions. Despite all these criticisms, Positivism is one of the most influential methodological traditions in sociology and guides empirical social research.

1.3.7 Let Us Sum Up

Positivism is the premise of Comte's sociology. It assumes that the scientific study of society should be based on observation, objectivity, empirical verification and formulation of universal laws. Comte was sure that sociology should use scientifically approach in the same way as natural sciences while taking into account the complexity of social phenomena.

Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences explains the logical evolution of scientific knowledge from mathematics to sociology. Every science is developed on the basis of achievements of preceding sciences while researching the more complicated phenomena. Sociology is the highest one as it is researching the most complex phenomenon of human society. Though Positivism has been criticised for treating society similar to the nature, its focus on scientific approach laid the foundation of methodological tradition of modern sociological research.

1.3.8 Keywords

Positivism, Empiricism, Objectivity, Natural Experiment, Hierarchy of Sciences

1.3.9 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the meaning, principles, and characteristics of Positivism as proposed by Auguste Comte.
2. Discuss the scientific methods advocated by Comte for the study of society.
3. Explain Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences and justify why sociology occupies the highest position.
4. Critically evaluate the significance of Positivism in the development of sociology as a scientific discipline.
5. Examine the strengths and limitations of Comte's positivist philosophy and its relevance in contemporary sociological research.

Lesson 1.4 - Social Statics vs. Social Dynamics

Structure

- 1.4.1 Objectives
- 1.4.2 Introduction
- 1.4.3 Concept of Social Statics
- 1.4.4 Concept of Social Dynamics
- 1.4.5 Contributions, Criticisms and Contemporary Relevance
- 1.4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.4.7 Keywords
- 1.4.8 Self-Assessment Questions

1.4.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the concepts of Social Statics and Social Dynamics;
- distinguish between the two dimensions of Comte's sociology;
- assess the major contributions of Auguste Comte to sociology;
- examine the criticisms of Comte's sociological thought; and
- Examine the contemporary relevance of Comte's ideas.

1.4.2 Introduction

One of Auguste Comte's significant contribution to sociology is the idea of classification of social phenomena into Social Statics and Social Dynamics. According to him, society should be researched from two different but complementary perspectives. The first one relates to the conditions of stability and harmony in society while the second one explains the processes of social change and progress. Together these notions form the basis of Comte's sociological discourse.

Comte thought that no society could exist without order and also it could not stay static for a long period of time. Social stability and social change are therefore complementary processes. While Social Statics explains the organisation of society and its functioning at a certain moment of time, Social Dynamics explains the process of development and transformation of societies. These ideas are influential in sociological

theories and are relevant for investigation of contemporary societies that experience rapid social, economic and technological changes.

1.4.3 Concept of Social Statics

Social Statics refers to the study of social order, social stability and conditions necessary for the harmonious functioning of society. Comte believed that any society consists of interconnected institutions that co-operate with each other for the sake of maintenance of the order and continuity of social life.

According to Comte, society is similar to living organism when each organ of human body performs its own function for survival of the whole organism. Various social institutions perform certain functions that maintain social stability. None of these institutions function in isolation but they are interconnected and support each other. Thus, Social Statics is concerned about the structure of society and relation between its elements. Comte considered the family to be the basic unit of society. He believed that family is the first institution where individuals learn cooperation, discipline, morality and social responsibility. family gives people emotional support and passes the values from one generation to another. Comte was sure that social stability is based on the stability of the family.

Social Institutions

Comte identified the following institutions that maintain social order:

- Family
- Religion
- Education
- Government
- Economy

Social Consensus

The main idea of Social Statics is the notion of consensus. According to Comte, society can exist only when its members share certain beliefs, values and moral principles. Such a moral consensus makes possible the establishment of social cohesion and reduces the level of conflicts. Consensus does not mean any sort of absolute uniformity but denotes the existence of such an extent of agreement among people to cooperate.

Order as the Foundation of Society

Order was an essential prerequisite of social progress for Comte. Disordered societies were always characterised by conflict, instability, and the lack of institutions and shared values. Therefore, preserving the order became the primary condition of realising progress. His famous principle «Order and Progress» testifies to this idea.

Table 1.4.1 The Main Components of Social Statics

Component	Role of the Component in Society
Family	Socialisation and moral development
Religion	Moral integration and social cohesion
Education	Transmission of knowledge and values
Government	Maintenance of law and order
Consensus	Promotion of social cooperation and stability

1.4.4 Concept of Social Dynamics

Whereas Social Statics is devoted to the maintenance of social order, the main subject matter of Social Dynamics is social change, social evolution and social progress. Comte was convinced that societies evolve permanently and the task of sociology is to reveal the laws of such development. In the opinion of Comte, there are specific laws of social development that can be identified empirically. The Law of Three Stages that was described in the previous lesson is the fundamental principle of intellectual and social evolution.

Sociological examination of Social Dynamics includes the following:

- To investigate the reasons for social changes;
- To determine the factors of social progress;
- To discover how institutions adapt to new conditions.

Intellectual Development as the Cause of Social Change

The evolution of human knowledge according to Comte was the main force driving the social development. The gradual transformation of human thinking from theological to scientific resulted in the development of political system, education, religion, economics and social structure. Thus, the intellectual progress became the base of social progress.

Social Evolution

Comte was convinced that societies develop gradually but never in revolutionary way. Social evolution is cumulative and consists of several stages. Therefore, Comte focused on evolutionary development rather than on revolution.

Order and Progress

One of the most famous ideas of Comte is the idea of the inseparability of order and progress. Social institutions create the conditions for progress and the progress itself promotes the strengthening of society, the improvement of institutions and increase of human welfare. Thus, for Comte any real progress cannot exist without order and vice versa.

Table 1.4.2 Social Statics and Social Dynamics: Comparative Analysis

Social Statics	Social Dynamics
Study of the social order	Study of social change
Emphasis on stability	Emphasis on progress
Analysis of social structure	Analysis of social evolution
Institutions	Transformation
Consensus	Development

1.4.5 Contributions, Criticisms and Contemporary Relevance

Contributions of Auguste Comte

Auguste Comte made a number of significant contributions into the history of sociological science. First, Comte contributed greatly to the creation of sociology as an independent scientific discipline by naming it «Sociology» and formulating the goals of sociological research. Second, the philosophy of Positivism formulated the methodology of sociological science. Emphasis on observation, objectivity and scientific approach still affects the methods of empirical sociology. Third, the Law of Three Stages introduced one of the first systematic theories of intellectual and social development. Fourth, the dichotomy of Social Statics and Social Dynamics introduced a comprehensive analytical framework for the research of social order and social change. Finally, the classification of the sciences showed the interdisciplinary nature of sociology and its relations with other sciences.

Criticism of Comte's Theory

Despite the prominent place in sociology occupied by Comte, his ideas have attracted several criticisms. Many scholars have stated that Comte exaggerated the role of scientific methods and did not pay enough attention to the subjective meanings, values and interpretations. The Law of Three Stages has been criticized as oversimplified and deterministic interpretation of social development because societies may demonstrate different types of thinking simultaneously. The Hierarchy of Sciences has also been criticized as too rigid. Modern science has become highly interdisciplinary, and hierarchical classification is not appropriate. Karl Marx has criticized Comte for ignoring economic struggle and class struggle as the main forces of social development. Max Weber insisted that sociology must understand the meanings that are attached by people to their actions instead of studying the laws only. Karl Popper has criticized Comte's idea that observation is the only source of scientific knowledge and pointed out that scientific theories must be open to criticism and falsification.

Contemporary Relevance

Despite these criticisms, the ideas of Comte continue to be influential. The modern sociological research continues to use systematic data collection, empirical observation, statistical analysis and objective investigation, which are the main principles of Positivism. Governmental organisations use census data, demographic surveys, public opinion polls and social indicators to formulate the evidence-based public policy according to the idea that scientific knowledge must be used for the purpose of social welfare. The dichotomy of social order and social change remains relevant in the analysis of such issues as globalisation, technological changes, migrations, urbanisation, environmental problems and digital revolution. Although the modern sociology combines both positivist and interpretive approaches, Comte's vision of sociology as a scientific discipline continues to be influential in the sociological discourse.

1.4.6 Let Us Sum Up

Social Statics and Social Dynamics represent the two complementary aspects of the Comte's sociology. Social Statics is concerned with the analysis of the conditions of social order, stability and integration, whereas Social Dynamics interprets the processes of social evolution and social progress. Comte believed that order and progress were the interdependent categories and sociology should study both scientifically.

The contribution of Comte in the history of sociology consists in the creation of sociology as an independent scientific discipline and advocacy of Positivism as the methodological base of sociology. Such Comte's notions as the Law of Three Stages, the Hierarchy of Sciences, Social Statics and Social Dynamics influenced greatly the development of classical sociological theory. Despite the criticism of many aspects of his work by subsequent sociologists, the emphasis on scientific inquiry and systematic analysis continues to guide sociological research and public policy.

1.4.7 Keywords

Social Statics, Social Dynamics, Social Order, Social Change, Social Progress, Social Institutions, Order and Progress.

1.4.8 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the concepts of Social Statics and Social Dynamics and discuss their relationship in Comte's sociological.
2. Examine the role of social institutions in maintaining social order.
3. Discuss the major contributions of Auguste Comte to the development of sociology as a scientific discipline.
4. Critically evaluate the limitations of Comte's sociological thought.
5. Assess the contemporary relevance of Comte's ideas in understanding modern society.

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UNIT – II

Karl Marx

Introduction

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) is one of the most renowned theorists in sociology, economics and political philosophy. The analysis of the nature of society conducted by Marx moved from the realm of ideas and institutions to the material conditions of social life. For Marx, the structure of society and any changes in it were determined by the production of material goods. Marx's theory laid the foundation for conflict theory and explained inequality, exploitation and social change.

This unit deals with the main sociological concepts and theories proposed by Karl Marx especially focuses on historical materialism, surplus value, alienation of labour and class conflict. These concepts explain the evolution of societies, the functioning of capitalist economies, experience of workers in industrial production and class struggle as a mechanism of social change. Even though these concepts and theories were developed in the nineteenth century, the ideas of Marx continue to play an important role in contemporary debates on globalization, labour relations, digital capitalism, income inequality and social justice. Understanding these concepts enables the learner to analyse not only historical developments but the current conditions of societies.

Objectives

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the life and intellectual background of Karl Marx.
- describe the concept of historical materialism and its role in explaining social change.
- analyse Marx's theory of surplus value and its connection with capitalist production.
- explain the concept of alienation of labour and its various dimensions.
- examine Marx's theory of class conflict and its importance in the explanation of social inequality.

- evaluate the contributions, criticism and current relevance of Marxian sociology.

Unit Structure

Lesson 2.1 Foundations of Marxian Sociology

Lesson 2.2 Historical Materialism

Lesson 2.3 Surplus Value and Alienation of Labour

Lesson 2.4 Class Conflict

Lesson 2.1 - Foundations of Marxian Sociology

Structure

- 2.1.1 Objectives
- 2.1.2 Introduction
- 2.1.3 Life and Intellectual Background of Karl Marx
- 2.1.4 Intellectual Influences on Marx
- 2.1.5 Foundations of Marxian Sociology
- 2.1.6 Major Works of Karl Marx
- 2.1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.1.8 Keywords
- 2.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

2.1.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the life and intellectual background of Karl Marx.
- identify the major philosophical and economic influences that shaped Marx's ideas.
- explain the fundamental principles underlying Marxian sociology.
- Appreciate the major works of Karl Marx and their significance in the development of sociology.

2.1.2 Introduction

Karl Marx occupies an important place among the classical sociologists. Along with Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, he made significant contribution to the emergence of sociology. However, contrary to many other thinkers of that time who tried to find the causes of social order and cohesion, Marx tried to understand inequality, exploitation and conflict within societies. Marx thought that social institutions, political system, law, religion and culture were closely related to the economic organization of society. Hence, the understanding of the economic structure of society is essential to understand the nature of social relationships and social change.

Marxian theories were developed in the nineteenth century amidst rapid industrialization, urbanization and development of capitalism throughout Europe. The Industrial Revolution led to the transformation of traditional agrarian societies into industrial economies which caused economic prosperity and wide spread poverty, as well as inequalities between factory owners and workers. All these changes in society motivated Marx to scientifically examine the functioning of capitalism and mechanisms of creation and distribution of wealth.

In contrast to the previous philosophers who interpreted the social reality from the moral and religious perspective, Marx took a materialistic perspective. According to Marx, the production of material necessities such as food, clothing, housing and technologies forms the basis of all societies. Changes in production methods result in changes in social institutions, political systems and patterns of social relationships. This approach, later called historical materialism, became one of the most influential theories in sociology.

Therefore, the core of Marxist sociology is the understanding of how economic systems influence human lives. The Marxian analysis extends from economics to politics, law, education, religion, ideology and culture. Contemporary sociological researches on inequality, labour relations, globalization, social movements and economic development. Thus, the ideas of Marx are of continuing relevance.

This lesson narrates the life and intellectual background of Karl Marx and the basic principles which formed the basis of Marxian sociology. This is needed for a better understanding of the detailed concepts of historical materialism, surplus value, alienation of labour and class conflict presented in following lessons.

2.1.3 Life and Intellectual Background of Karl Marx

Karl Marx was born on 5 May 1818 in Trier, a town in the Rhine region of Prussia (current Germany). Marx lived during the epoch of profound economic, political and intellectual transformations in Europe. The nineteenth century saw the rapid spreading of industrial capitalism, the end of the feudal system, the emergence of the modern nation states and rising claims for political rights and social reforms. All these changes deeply affected the thinking of Marx and provided the historical background for development of his sociological theories.

Marx was a member of the middle-class family. His father, Heinrich Marx, was a lawyer who shared the principles of the Enlightenment such as reason, liberty and secularism. The environment in which Marx grew up inspired him to challenge the established beliefs and have a critical view of society. Marx received education in literature, philosophy, history and classical languages later.

Marx started his higher education at the University of Bonn in 1835 where he first studied law. But very soon Marx turned his interests from legal studies to philosophy, history and political economy. Later he joined the University of Berlin which was one of the leading centres of philosophical thought in Europe. At Berlin, Marx encountered the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel which was very popular among the German intellectuals. Even though Marx criticized many aspects of the Hegelian philosophy, he accepted its dialectic method and used it in the framework of materialism. This was an important turning point in the formation of Marxian sociology.

Upon the completion of his doctoral studies in 1841, Marx aimed to become researcher. Yet, he being a radical political thinker and critic of the Prussian regime made it impossible for him to get a job at the university. As a result, Marx turned to journalism. As the editor of the liberal newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx came in direct contact with various political issues, including poverty, censorship, land ownership, freedom of the press, and labour rights. As a result, Marx realized that any political problem can be solved only if one analyzes the economic structure of society. Thus, this experience was one of the crucial turning points in his sociological thought.

The government censorship eventually closed the newspaper, and Marx was forced to leave Germany. His years of political exile were extremely fruitful intellectually. He lived in Paris, Brussels, and finally in London where he spent most of his lifetime. During this time, Marx witnessed various political movements, organizations of working classes, and revolutionary ideas of Europe. Moreover, Marx got an opportunity to witness the social consequences of industrial capitalism, including poverty, exploitation of children, long hours of work, unemployment, and growing inequality.

One of the most significant events in Marx's intellectual journey was his lifelong collaboration with Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1895). Engels was a German industrialist, philosopher, and social theorist who like Marx

was concerned about the exploitation of workers in capitalism. Having personally seen the conditions in factories of England, he provided Marx with empirical data on industrial society. Moreover, Engels funded Marx to continue his writings despite the severe financial hardships. Together, Marx and Engels wrote several books that became classic works in political sociology, including *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) that became one of the most famous political documents in the world. This major work proves how theoretical analysis and empirical observation are combined in Marxian sociology.

in London, Marx devoted his time to research at the British Museum Library. In those years he systematically analyzed capitalism, industrial production, labour, markets, and economic crises. His monumental book *Das Kapital* is a result of years of his research on the mechanisms of capitalist economies. Contrary to criticizing capitalism as immoral, Marx tried to show how capitalism scientifically creates the wealth while also reproducing exploitation, inequality, and economic crises.

Social conditions of nineteenth-century Europe greatly influenced the theoretical orientation of Marx. The industrial revolution led to the transformation of production from craft industries to mechanized factories. Even though industrialization greatly increased productivity and economic growth, it also led to the formation of a large working class which had low wages, poor working conditions, crowded cities, lack of political rights, and so on. These conditions seemed to Marx not as isolated social problems but structural consequences of capitalist mode of production. For this reason, his sociology concentrated on analysis of the economic conditions that form social institutions and human relations.

Marx's intellectual path also reflected transformation in European thought. Earlier philosophers usually used religion, morality, and other abstract ideals for the explanation of society. In contrast to them, Marx argued that the material life is the base of any social organization. First of all, people need to provide themselves with the necessities of life before they do politics, religion, education, culture, and so on. Thus, he proclaimed that the economic organization of society largely determined the development of its institutions and ideas.

Despite the fact that Marx died on March 14, 1883 without completing many of his planned writings, his intellectual heritage was continued by Engels and Marxists. His theories deeply affected sociology, economics, political science, history, anthropology, cultural studies, and development

studies. Marx's ideas also had an impact on the labour movements, socialist parties, anti-colonial movements, and welfare policies in many parts of the world. On the other hand, his ideas provoked many debates and criticisms, thus making him one of the most influential social thinkers in modern history. Distinction of Marx's contribution is his method of analysis of society through the interrelations between production, power, inequality, and social change.

2.1.4 Intellectual Influences on Marx

Marx sociological perspective arose as a result of the critical attitude towards the intellectual traditions that dominated in European thought of the nineteenth century. However, he did not agree to them passively, Marx evaluated their adequacies and inadequacies and incorporated into his own theory. The work of Marx is greatly influenced by German philosophy, British political economy, and French socialism, and at the same time it rejects these traditions.

It is important to understand these intellectual influences because most of the main concepts of Marx, including historical materialism, surplus value, alienation, and class struggle were developed through the dialogue with these theories. Marx himself stated that scientific knowledge is based upon criticism of existing ideas.

Influence of the Dialectical Philosophy of Hegel

Among all thinkers who influenced Marx, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831) occupies a special place. Hegel believed that history is a dynamic process of development that is determined by contradictions. Every existing idea and social condition (thesis) generates its opposite (antithesis), and their contradiction results in a new higher stage of development (synthesis). Such a process is called dialectics and it explains the historical development as a constant movement from one stage to another. According to Hegel, development of human ideas and consciousness is the main engine of historical development. All social institutions, political systems, and historical processes were just expressions of the development of human reason or "Absolute Spirit". Thus, history is actually the history of ideas.

Marx highly appreciated the dialectical approach of Hegel because it focuses on movement, contradiction, and change rather than stability. Marx agreed with the idea that societies develop through contradictions and that struggle is an integral part of social development. However, he

rejected Hegel's idealism arguing that Hegel had "turned reality upside down".

While Marx rejected Hegel's idealist approach, he turned Hegel's theory upside down and stated that material conditions are the main force driving the development of society. First of all, human beings have to produce food, clothing, housing, and other things they need for survival before any political systems, religious beliefs, and philosophical thoughts could arise. Thus, Marx converted idealist dialectics of Hegel into materialist dialectics, laying a groundwork for his historical materialism. "Turning Hegel on His Head" In his work Marx noted that he had turned Hegel's dialectic "on its head" since while Hegel believed that consciousness creates existence, social existence determines consciousness.

Influence of Ludwig Feuerbach's

Another important intellectual tradition that influenced Marx was materialism promoted by a German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872). Ludwig Feuerbach rejected the idealist tradition of Hegel and stated that religion and philosophy have to be considered from the point of view of human beings and material reality. Religion and philosophy were created by humans themselves and reflect people's needs, ambitions, and social environment.

Marx highly appreciated Feuerbach's critique of idealism and stress on material reality. Feuerbach's philosophy inspired Marx to think about people as social and material beings rather than philosophical entities. Such approach helped Marx to believe that sociology should be developed considering social and economic conditions of people.

Nevertheless, Marx thought that the materialism of Feuerbach was not enough. Feuerbach interpreted society but did not provide an explanation of how it could be changed. According to Marx, interpretation of material conditions is futile if it is not supported by actions aimed at changing social order. The above-mentioned opinion is expressed in the following Marx's well-known words: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

Influence of British Political Economy

British classical economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo played an important role in Marx's theoretical development. It was their research on markets, production, labor, and wealth that provided Marx with some

economic concepts he later modified and elaborated. Adam Smith argued that labor is a source of wealth and analyzed division of labor which is necessary for increasing of productivity. Further, David Ricardo developed labor theory of value according to which the value of commodities depends on labor spent for their production.

Marx agreed that labor is an essential component of production process but opposed conclusions made by British economists. Marx believed that classical economists described markets without pointing out the exploitative relations between employers and workers. According to Marx, workers produce more value during the production process than they receive as wage. The difference between the value produced during labor and wage constitutes surplus value which serves as the basis for profit of capitalists. In this way, Marx transformed political economy into a critical analysis of the capitalist production. He did not praise capitalism as an effective economic system but criticized it as an economic system characterized by exploitation reproducing inequality.

Influence of French Socialist Thought

French socialists as Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon criticized social inequalities caused by industrial capitalism and called for a social justice. They imagined cooperative societies instead of competitive societies and tried to improve lives of workers.

Marx appreciated the emphasis on the advocacy of social equality and criticism of capitalism of French socialists. Nevertheless, he criticized that early socialists put forward moral arguments and idealistic conceptions of the future society. As they provided models of an ideal society without explaining how such a society could arise, Marx later called them utopian socialists.

Marx tried to analyze scientifically how capitalism emerges, what contradictions it causes and how these contradictions lead to the social transformation. According to Marx, socialism will not appear as a result of wish for equality but because of contradictions of capitalism which will inevitably provoke revolutionary changes.

Influence of the Industrial Revolution

Though not being an individual thinker, the Industrial Revolution played an important role in the formation of Marx's ideas. In the nineteenth

century there was an intensive industrialization of Europe accompanied by the rise of technologies and production in factories. It caused an increase in the level of productivity and prosperity of Europeans but at the same time there were many social problems especially affecting the urban poor and industrial workers.

Workers worked for a long period of time in bad conditions receiving low wage and having no job security. Children and women were widely employed in factories in hard conditions. There were serious problems of overcrowding in the cities and poverty despite increasing industrial prosperity.

All these facts convinced Marx that capitalism is characterized by an antagonism that although it is productive, it concentrates wealth among the small number of capitalists and subjects the great part of population to the economic insecurity. This contradiction formed the basis for Marx's theories of surplus value, alienation and class struggle.

Synthesis of Diverse Intellectual Traditions

The originality of Marx's sociology consists not in borrowing ideas of other thinkers but in combining these ideas in one theoretical tradition. From Hegel, Marx borrowed dialectics but refused idealism. From Feuerbach, he accepted materialism but refused to observe passively and called for transformative social action. From British political economists, he borrowed the labor theory of value but used it for criticizing capitalist exploitation. From French socialists, he borrowed the aim of achieving social equality but replaced utopian ideals with scientific analysis of historical development. Finally, his observations of the industrial capitalism allowed him to combine philosophical ideas with social realities.

Such synthesis of diverse influences resulted in the development of the comprehensive sociological theory which explains society through economic structures, class relations, production systems and historical development. This sociological theory is known as Marxian sociology and it is one of the most influential theoretical traditions in the sociology.

2.1.5 Principles of Marxian Sociology

Marxian sociology is one of the most influential theoretical paradigms in sociology. The aim of this tradition is to find out how societies are structured, why and how they develop inequalities, and how societies change over time. In contrast to the approaches that emphasis the social

order, Marxian sociology emphasizes the significance of economic relations, modes of production and power. According to Marx, the social reality is dynamic rather than static, and the conflicts that result from economic inequality play a crucial role in historical evolution.

The foundations of Marxian sociology consist of the set of interrelated principles that provide systematic understanding of society. These principles are guiding sociological investigations of inequality, labour, development, globalization and social change.

Materialist Conception of Society

The most fundamental principle of Marxian sociology is the materialist conception of society. Marx insisted that people need to satisfy material necessities before performing other social, political and cultural activities. Each society needs goods and services to sustain itself, including food, clothes, housing and technologies. Hence, the way of organizing the production forms the base of the social structure.

According to Marx, economic organization affects the development of such institutions as family, education, religion, law, and politics. These institutions have some autonomy, but nevertheless they depend on the dominant economic system. Therefore, if sociologists want to comprehend the society, they should investigate how the production is organized, who controls productive resources and how wealth is distributed. This materialist perspective was radically different from the previous views that considered religion, morality or philosophy to be the main factors of social development.

Society as a Dynamic and Changing System

Marx perceived society as dynamic rather than a static and permanent order. Social institutions, political organization and economic system are historical phenomena, and they change along with time. No matter how powerful the social system is, it will never remain forever. According to Marx, each mode of production consists of the contradictions that eventually destroy the existing social order and create the conditions for emergence of new social system. The contradictions create the tension between social classes, and finally lead to the structural changes.

For example, feudalism was succeeded by capitalism due to changes in production techniques that created the economic relations that could not be integrated within the feudal framework. The same happened with

capitalism and therefore Marx believed that capitalism would eventually create the conditions for another stage of development.

The historical perspective distinguishes Marxian sociology from the theories that perceive the society just as a mechanism of maintaining social stability.

Central Role of Production

Production plays a very important role in the Marxian sociology. Humans use labour to transform nature and get the necessary goods and services. These productive activities not only satisfy material needs, but also determine social relations, institutions and patterns of authority. According to Marx, each society can be investigated through analyzing the following three related aspects:

- forces of production that include labour, technologies, nature and machinery;
- relations of production that mean social relations that occur in the process of production; and
- mode of production that means economic organization.

The interaction of these elements determines the structure of the society and its historical development. Being the material basis of social life, the changes in the production techniques may cause the changes in the political, legal and cultural institutions.

Significance of Social Classes

Another fundamental principle of Marxian sociology is that societies consist of social classes that differ in relation to the means of production. The means of production include land, factories, machinery, raw materials and other resources used for economic activities.

Individuals who own and control these resources hold the economic power, while individuals who have only the labour power have to work for wages. Thus, the unequal relations create social classes with different interests and opportunities.

Marx insisted that distribution of economic resources is the decisive factor that determines the social status of individuals. As a result, class becomes the main source of inequality concerning income, education, political influence and opportunities. The class division differs greatly from the traditional social hierarchy based on birth and social status

because of the fact that the capitalist societies are stratified according to the ownership and control over the productive resources.

Conflict as the Driving Force of Social Change

Marx considered the conflict rather than consensus to be the basic mechanism of historical development of societies. As different social classes have conflicting economic interests, it leads to the inevitable conflicts. Those who control productive resources always strive for preservation of existing economic relations, while those who are exploited try to improve their situation. The conflicting interests give rise to the constant social struggles that affect political institutions, legal system and social change.

Marx did not consider conflict to be pathological or destructive phenomenon. On the contrary, he saw it as the inevitable phenomenon caused by the economic inequality and the source of historical transformation. This idea was developed later in his conflict theory that became the most significant theoretical paradigm in sociology.

Scientific Investigation of Society

Marx thought that society should be scientifically investigated through the analysis of social and economic conditions. Instead of making only moral judgments and philosophical speculations, Marx tried to reveal the objective laws of historical development of human societies.

His investigations were based on the historical data, economic information and the analysis of industrial production. Marx wanted to discover why and how inequalities emerged, how the capitalist economy progressed and what the conditions favoured social change. Therefore, Marx considered his approach to be the scientific socialism, which differed from the earlier socialism that offered utopian ideals but did not provide analysis of historical processes that led to the emergence of such societies.

Relationship Between Economy and Other Social Institutions

Marx thought that economic organization significantly affected the other institutions of society. Political system, legal institutions, educational establishments, religious beliefs and cultural values do not exist apart from economic activity. They develop in the particular economic context and often support the existing social order. For example, the laws concerning the property rights, labour relations, taxes and inheritance reflect the existing economic ownership. Also, educational establishments prepare

people for the occupation, while political institutions regulate economic relations. This approach implies that every social institution depends on the economy. In fact, Marx suggested that economic structures provide the basis for the existence of other institutions.

Advocacy

A unique feature of Marxian sociology is its commitment to both the explanation of society and its transformation. In other words, Marx proposed that sociological theories should not just describe society but reveal the causes of inequality and exploitation. Understanding these mechanisms makes it possible to work out the ways of transforming social reality to achieve equality. This practical aspect distinguishes Marx from most of the previous philosophers. For Marx, sociology is a science that can help to create a new society by identifying the contradictions in the economic system.

Enduring significance of Marxian Sociology

Though Marx created his theories in the nineteenth century, the foundations of his sociology continue to inspire modern research. Sociologists use the Marxian approaches to study economic inequality, labour markets, globalization, multinational corporations, environmental issues, technological changes, and platform economy. Such categories as class, exploitation, commodification, and labour relations are essential for the understanding contemporary social phenomena. Thus, the enduring importance of Marxian sociology proves that despite the evolution of economic systems, the issues of power, inequality, ownership, and social justice are relevant subjects of sociological studies.

For example, take a multinational e-commerce company that runs digital warehouses. The company owns warehouses, technologies, algorithms, and logistics. Workers pack, sort and deliver goods. Wages, working hours, productivity standards, and working conditions are determined by the owners and managers of the company. Using the Marxian perspective, a sociologist will focus on the ownership of productive resources, relations between capital and labour, and the unequal distribution of economic power, and not just on the efficiency of the business.

2.1.6 Major Works of Karl Marx

Karl Marx produced scholarly writings on philosophy, economics, history, politics, and society. However, Marx's writings were not pure

academic articles but systematic analyses of the processes of social and economic transformation that took place in the nineteenth century. Using his writings, Marx developed such sociological concepts as historical materialism, class struggle, surplus value, alienation, and critique of capitalism.

Most of Marx's works were written in collaboration with Friedrich Engels, some were written independently. Many of his important manuscripts were published only after the author's death when they were edited and compiled by Engels. All these publications formed the theoretical foundation of Marxian sociology.

The major works of Karl Marx include the following:

The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: These manuscripts written by Marx in his early Paris period were published only posthumously in 1932. This work can be considered one of the first attempts by Marx to analyse the impact of capitalism on society. The main idea of this work is alienation. According to Marx, under capitalism, workers get alienated from the products of their labour, the process of production, other workers, and ultimately from themselves. Thus, labour, which is supposed to be the expression of creativity of humans, turns into nothing more than means of earning money. These manuscripts, although unpublished in Marx's lifetime, became the basis of his theory of alienation.

The German Ideology (1845-1846): Written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology can be considered one of the important stages of the formation of mature ideas of Marx. This work remained unpublished during their lifetime but introduced the systematic formulation of historical materialism. In this work, Marx and Engels asserted that the material conditions of life, mainly the mode of production, predetermine the organisation of the society. According to Marx and Engels, human history is primarily the history of changes in economic systems and not the history of philosophies. This work criticised German idealist philosophy by pointing out that it did not pay attention to the role of material production and economic relations. Concepts of historical materialism, originate from this book.

The Poverty of Philosophy (1847): The Poverty of Philosophy was written as a critique of the ideas of French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Marx contradicted the views of Proudhon that the problems of social inequalities can be solved only by the means of moral changes and voluntary cooperation. According to Marx, social change should be

explained scientifically using the analysis of economic structures and class relations. This book strengthened the difference between utopian and scientific socialism.

The Communist Manifesto (1848): Perhaps, the most famous political writing by Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto was published in 1848 for the Communist League. Despite being a small volume, it had an enormous impact on sociology, political science, and the history of the world.

The Manifesto starts with the famous sentence:

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” This proposition reveals one of the central principles of Marxian sociology. It proclaims that class struggle is the force that drives historical development. The Manifesto analyses the emergence of capitalism, the origin of bourgeois class, the exploitation of proletariat, and the inevitability of class struggle. It also describes Marx’s vision of a classless society based on collective ownership of means of production. This book, although it was written as a political programme, is still an important sociological text because it offers a systematic analysis of capitalist society and social change.

A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859): This book is one of the important stages in the economic analysis of Marx and one of his best formulations of the relationship between the economic structure of society and other institutions. In its famous preface, Marx asserts that the economic structure of society forms the real foundation where other institutions develop. This idea later became known as the Infrastructure and superstructure model, which plays a central role in Marxian sociology.

This book also was a preparation for the further analysis of capitalism made by Marx in Das Kapital.

Das Kapital (Capital): Das Kapital is considered one of the greatest scholarly works of Marx. The first volume of this work was published in 1867 in Marx’s lifetime, while the other two volumes – II and III – appeared later after being edited by Friedrich Engels. In his famous work, Marx comprehensively analyzed the capitalist mode of production. The book deals with such topics as commodities, labour, value, wages, profit, capital accumulation, technological progress, and recurrent economic crises.

Some of the concepts, considered in this unit, receive an elaborate discussion in Das Kapital including the following:

- labour theory of value;
- surplus value;
- capitalist exploitation;
- capital accumulation;
- concentration of wealth;
- class relations and
- economic crises.

Contrary to the previous economists, who understood capitalism merely as an effective system of production, Marx showed how the quest for profits led to the emergence of structural contradictions and economic inequalities, which threatened the very existence of the capitalist system. The value of *Das Kapital* for sociologists is in connecting the economic processes with patterns of social organization and inequality.

Other Important Works

Apart from his major books, Marx authored several essays, pamphlets, and political analysis, which made significant contribution to the sociology.

The *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) discusses political power, class alliances, and the relations between the state and social classes in France. The work shows how political events can be explained in terms of class interests.

The Civil War in France (1871) discusses the Paris Commune and the role of the state, democracy, and workers' movements.

Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875) represents Marx's views about socialism, transformation of capitalism, and the principles of the future communist society.

This is another example of applying the sociological theories to historical and political reality.

Relevance of Marx's Writings for Sociology

Marx's writings are concerned with many issues such as economics, history, philosophy, and politics. However, their importance for sociology is in offering a comprehensive explanation of functioning and evolution of societies.

They have introduced several important concepts to the sociological theories including:

- society as a historically evolving system;
- relation between economy and social institutions;
- historical materialism;
- class structure and inequality;
- exploitation and surplus value;
- alienation of labour;
- class conflict as a source of social changes;
- critical analysis of capitalism.

These concepts still play a crucial part in the research of labour relations, globalization, development, stratification, political economy, environmental sociology, and sociology of work.

Table 2.1.1 Major Works of Karl Marx and their Sociological Significance

Major Work	Year	Major Sociological Contribution
Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts	1844 (published 1932)	Introduced the concept of alienation
The German Ideology	1845–46	Developed historical materialism
The Poverty of Philosophy	1847	Critique of utopian socialism; scientific socialism
The Communist Manifesto	1848	Explained class struggle and capitalist development
A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy	1859	Introduced the base–superstructure relationship
Das Kapital (<i>Vol. I</i>)	1867	Analysis of capitalism, surplus value, exploitation, and capital accumulation
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte	1852	Analysis of the state, political power, and class relations
Critique of the Gotha Programme	1875	Discussed socialism and the transition to communism

2.1.7 Let Us Sum Up

Karl Marx is among the key founders of classical sociology. Being a contemporary of the Industrial Revolution, he tried to understand society in terms of its economic organization rather than in terms of ideas and moral principles. Marx's intellectual development was under the influence of German philosophy, British political economy, and French socialism – all of them he critically examined and used as a basis for developing his sociological perspective focused on material life, production, and social change.

The premise of Marxian sociology rests on the materialist approach to society, the importance of production, class relations, and conflicts as the driving forces of historical development. Marx's major works, especially *The German Ideology*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *Das Kapital*, have introduced important concepts, which are being employed in sociological research on inequality, labour, capitalism, and social change. These ideas represent the basis for the theories of historical materialism, surplus value, alienation of labour, and class conflict to be discussed in the following lessons.

2.1.8 Keywords

Materialism; Dialectics; Means of Production; Mode of Production; Scientific Socialism; Class

2.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the life and intellectual background of Karl Marx.
2. Discuss the major intellectual influences that shaped Marx's sociological thought.
3. Explain the basic foundations of Marxian sociology.
4. Describe the major works of Karl Marx and their significance.
5. Examine the relevance of Marx's ideas for understanding contemporary society

Lesson 2.2 - Historical Materialism

Structure

- 2.2.1 Objectives
- 2.2.2 Introduction
- 2.2.3 Concept of Historical Materialism
- 2.2.4 Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism
- 2.2.5 Forces of Production and Relations of Production
- 2.2.6 Mode of Production
- 2.2.7 Base and Superstructure
- 2.2.8 Historical Development of Society
- 2.2.9 Historical Materialism as a Theory of Social Change
- 2.2.10 Criticisms of Historical Materialism
- 2.2.11 Contemporary Relevance of Historical Materialism
- 2.2.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.2.13 Keywords
- 2.2.14 Self-Assessment Questions

2.2.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of historical materialism and its importance in Marxian sociology.
- distinguish between dialectical materialism and historical materialism.
- describe the concepts of forces of production, relations of production, and mode of production.
- explain the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure.
- analyse historical materialism as a theory of social change and evaluate its contemporary relevance.

2.2.2 Introduction

Historical materialism is the foundation of Karl Marx's sociological theory and one of the most powerful theories in explaining the process of

social change. Historical materialism provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of society based on material conditions, rather than abstract and ideological concepts. According to Marx, human history is defined by the processes of producing the necessities of life and organizing economic processes. Change in the system of production leads to the development of social relations, politics, law and culture.

Unlike previous thinkers who perceived the history of development through religion or philosophy, Marx claimed that material production is the basis of every society. People have to produce food, clothing, shelter and other necessities in order to engage in political, religious, educational and cultural activities. Thus, the economic organization of society impacts other social institutions.

Historical materialism is not just a theory of economics, but a full-scale sociological approach to the analysis of the connection between production, class relations and historical changes. It reveals why societies develop in the direction from one stage to another and why contradictions in economic systems lead to the creation of new social organization. Employing the theory of historical materialism, Marx interpreted history as a process of change driven by the changes in the mode of production and conflicts resulting from the unequal economic relations.

This lesson is planned to present the concept and principles of historical materialism, its relation to dialectic materialism, the concepts of productive forces and production relations, the base-superstructure model, historical development of societies and the relevance of historical materialism in analyzing contemporary social change.

2.2.3 Concept of Historical Materialism

Historical materialism is the method innovated by Karl Marx for interpreting the origin, development and transformation of human societies. The theory claims that the material conditions of life, especially the process of production, define the primary force of history. Contrary to the approaches that proposed that the history was determined by rulers, religions and philosophical ideas, Marx maintained that changes in economic life explain the development of history.

The term historical means the evolution of society in different historical stages over time, while, materialism means that the evolution of society is based on material production and economic relations. Therefore,

historical materialism may be considered as the interpretation of history through the evolution of material conditions of human life.

Marx was sure that every society had to solve one main problem — the problem of producing the goods and services needed for the human survival. Methods of production define not only economic system but also social interactions, political power, legal institutions, education, religion and culture. Hence, the changes in the methods of production cause changes in the whole social structure.

For instance, the change from agricultural production to mechanized factory production during the Industrial Revolution resulted not only in the changes in economy but also in changes of family life, the development of urbanization, labor relations, political institutions and educational system. The theory of historical materialism interprets such changes through the underlying changes in production rather than considering the development of political and cultural phenomena in isolation.

Marx rejected the idealistic perspective claiming that ideas create society. Instead of it, he claimed that the human consciousness develops in definite social and economic conditions. Ideas, values, political views, religions and other aspects of the life are formed under definite material conditions. Such ideas are reflected in Marx's famous statement that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness".

This statement does not mean that ideas are meaningless. Marx meant that ideas themselves appear in definite historical and material conditions. For example, democratic ideals, the ideas of the freedom of individual and human rights appeared in the epoch of appearance of capitalist societies and changes in economic relations. Therefore, the historical materialism is based on the principle that the study of society should commence from the analysis of the way people produce and distribute material resources. Each historical period has definite mode of production that impacts social institutions and class relations. With the development of productive forces, contradictions between the existing relations of production and the new economic conditions appear. Thus, contradictions lead to conflicts that result in transformation of society into a new historical stage.

Hence, historical materialism perceives history as a dynamic and continuous process, rather than the set of separated events. Societies like feudalism and capitalism are considered as definite historical forms of economic organization which appear, develop and eventually give way to

new societies when they cannot keep up with the changing productive forces.

An important feature of the theory of historical materialism is its emphasis on the interaction between human agency and material conditions. People make history by means of their productive activities but they act in definite economic and social conditions inherited from previous periods. Hence, history is neither predestination nor it depends only on social actions; it is shaped through the interaction of human productive activity, economic conditions, technological development and social conflicts.

historical materialism is the scientific approach to the long-term social transformation. It helps to understand the causes of society's changes, the reason for inequality and the way in which economic development influences politics, law, education, religion and culture. Marx analyzed them as interconnected components of larger social system which is based on material production.

The significance of historical materialism did not end with the nineteenth century's industrial society. Modern sociologists also apply the principles of historical materialism to the analysis of globalization, technological change, digital economies, labor market, ecological crisis and economic inequality. Despite the differences between the modern and Marx's economies, the connection between economic structures and social institutions continue to be the important theme of sociology.

2.2.4 Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism

Historical materialism cannot be understood without the concept of dialectical materialism. Though the concepts are similar and are often used interchangeably, they represent different aspects of Marx' philosophy. Dialectical materialism is the method of philosophy for the understanding of changes and development; historical materialism is the application of this method in the process of interpretation of the evolution of human societies. In brief, dialectical materialism interprets the ways of changes and historical materialism to discover the reasons for social change.

Concept of Dialectics

The term 'dialectics' comes from the ancient Greek word *dialogesthai*, which means discussion or debate. In philosophy, dialectics implies the approach to reality as an ongoing process of motion, contradiction, and

development. Unlike static approaches to the world, dialectics assumes that everything is interconnected and constantly evolving.

Dialectics was developed into a systematic philosophical approach by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. According to him, history moves in a way driven by the conflict between opposing ideas. Every existing idea or condition (which Hegel called a thesis) is always opposed by its own antithesis, and as a result of the conflict between these two poles, a synthesis is born, becoming a new basis for another conflict. The engine of this process was the evolution of human consciousness or human ideas. Institutions, systems, and events of history were expressions of the evolution of human reason.

Marx's Materialist Transformation of Dialectics

As already noted, Marx accepted the Hegelian dialectics due to its emphasis on the aspects of motion, contradiction, and development. However, he rejected Hegel's idealism as his basic philosophical tenet.

Marx criticized Hegel's emphasis on ideas as fundamental source of historical changes. On the contrary, human beings need to produce first food, clothes, shelter, etc. to live; and only then they become able to participate in politics, religion, philosophy, art and other cultural activities. Hence, contradictions do not arise in the world of ideas but in the organization of material society.

Marx said that he had 'turned Hegel's dialectic right side up'. While Hegel asserted that ideas shaped material life, Marx was convinced that material life shaped ideas. So dialectics has become the tool for studying real social and economic contradictions, rather than abstract concepts.

For example, there is a contradiction in capitalist society between employers' wish to increase their profit and employees' desire to improve their living standards. This is not an ideological contradiction, but one which is generated directly by the nature of capitalist economic production. Marx believed that contradictions of this kind lead to social change and transformation.

Principles of Dialectical Materialism

Marx did not formulate dialectical materialism as the doctrine of laws. Later Marxist scholars, however, have identified the following basic principles of dialectical materialism:

1. reality is in constant change;
2. development is based on contradictions;
3. every social system contains contradictions that lead to its transformation;
4. development proceeds through negation – each historical stage is a new stage replacing the old one while keeping certain of its useful elements;
5. development is gradual in terms of small quantitative changes ultimately lead to major qualitative transformations.

These principles allow studying society as an evolving system, not a set of static institutions.

Historical Materialism involves the Application of Dialectics to Society

While dialectical materialism is the general philosophy of change, historical materialism is its application to the development of human society.

Historical materialism holds that

- humans sustain themselves through production;
- the organization of production determines social relations;
- each mode of production has its own contradictions;
- contradictions lead to the emergence of classes and class conflicts; and
- class conflicts result in transformation of society into a new historical stage.

Therefore, historical materialism can be seen as an application of dialectical principles to society and history.

For example, capitalism fosters technological progress and creation of wealth. However, the development of technologies leads to reduction of jobs, inequality, and the struggle of capital and labour. All these contradictions sooner or later will lead to institutional and structural change.

Difference Between Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism

Dialectical materialism and historical materialism differ from each other as shown in the following table.

Table 2.2.1 Difference between Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism

Basis	Dialectical Materialism	Historical Materialism
Nature	A philosophical method	A sociological and historical theory
Focus	Explains the general laws of change in nature and society	Explains historical development through material conditions
Primary Concern	Contradictions and continuous development	Evolution of societies through changing modes of production
Driving Force	Internal contradictions in reality	Economic production and class relations
Scope	Broad philosophical framework	Application of dialectics to human history
Main Objective	To explain how change occurs	To explain why societies change over time

Thus, the two concepts complement each other – dialectical materialism serves as a philosophical base while historical materialism is the application of dialectics to human history.

Sociological relevance

The distinction between dialectical materialism and historical materialism has great significance in sociology. It shows that social change is not random but the product of structural processes. With his emphasis on contradictions, production, and class relations, Marx moved sociological analysis from static description of society to the study of its historical development.

It affected many fields of sociological research, such as economic sociology, labour sociology, political sociology, development sociology, environmental sociology, globalization, and others. Issues like automation, digital capitalism, precarious employment, and other forms of technological disruption still illustrate the interaction of transforming productive forces and social relations.

Historical materialism remains a relevant analytical framework for studying the effects of economic transformations on institutions and power relations in industrial and post-industrial societies. For instance,

at the latter phases of feudalism, technological development could not fit in the framework of the feudal order based on inherited nobility and agriculture production. With further advancements of productive forces, capitalism replaced feudalism.

Further, Marx claimed that modern capitalism includes contradictions between rapid developments of productive forces and capitalist relations of production. He believed that those contradictions would eventually form the conditions for a new historical phase.

The distinction between productive forces and production relations allows sociologists to explain why societies change over time. The process of economic development involves not only technological improvements but also changes in the patterns of ownership, organization of labour, and social relationships.

Thus, historical materialism suggests that social change results from the interaction of the two above components. New technologies alone cannot cause societal transformation; it happens when there emerges a conflict between productive forces and production relations.

This theory is still valid in the 21st century. The rapid development of automation, artificial intelligence, digital platforms, renewable energy, and biotechnology is currently transforming productive forces. At the same time, people witness discussions about employment issues, workers' rights, data ownership, monopoly of platforms, and economic inequalities. These phenomena show how changing productive forces continue to affect production relations and institutions.

For example, the development of digital platforms can serve as an example of interaction of productive forces and production relations. The development of technologies such as smartphones, cloud computing, GPS systems, and artificial intelligence increases productive forces. However, at the same time, they transform relations of production as they result in gig work, algorithmic management, flexible contracts, and new forms of employer-employee relationships. According to Marxian approach, the sociologist would analyze such processes by studying how changes in productive forces lead to the formation of new production relations and new forms of social inequalities.

2.2.6 Mode of Production

The concept of mode of production is fundamental for Marx's theory of historical materialism. Marx believed that each society is organized

according to a particular form of economic organization that defines how production is carried out, who controls production resources, how labour is organized, and how the products of labour are distributed among various segments of the population. Such system is called the mode of production.

According to Marx, mode of production is the basis of every social system. It affects organization of political institutions, legal system, education system, religion, family relationships, and culture. Thus, to understand any society, sociologists have to understand its mode of production.

Definition of Mode of Production

A mode of production refers to the particular combination of forces of production and relations of production in a certain historical period.

Mode of Production = Forces of Production + Relations of Production

The forces of production consist of labour, technologies, machinery, natural resources, and scientific knowledge, while relations of production determine the forms of ownership, control, power, and labour relationships. Together these two elements form the economic structure of society.

For example, the society with advanced technologies of industry, but with the private ownership of factories represents the capitalist mode of production, while society with predominant agriculture and feudal landownership represents feudal mode of production.

Marx believed that each mode of production had its own class structure and social relations.

Characteristics of Mode of Production

Each mode of production has its own distinctive characteristics.

1. **Historically specific:** Each mode of production emerged in particular historical conditions and exists only for a certain period of time. Any economic system is not permanent. Slave societies, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism represent different historical stages.
2. **Determines class structure:** Various modes of production determine different social classes based on ownership of productive resources. Under feudalism, there was a division of society into landlords and peasants, whereas under capitalism there is a division into capitalists and wage labourers.

3. Shapes social institutions: Political systems, legal system, educational system, religion, and culture evolve according to the particular mode of production.
4. Internal contradictions: Any mode of production creates contradictions between productive forces and relations of production. These contradictions eventually destroy the existing mode of production and lead to the formation of a new mode of production.

Components of Mode of Production

The mode of production consists of two interconnected elements.

Productive Forces: These include labour, machinery, technologies, scientific knowledge, natural resources, infrastructure, and management. They define the productive potential of society and evolve due to the continuous innovation of technologies.

Relations of Production: These refer to social relationships established in the process of production, namely ownership, control, power, organization of labour, and distribution of economic benefits. Interaction of the two elements determines the functioning of the economy and of the whole society.

Modes of Production in the History of Human society

Marx believed that the history of human society includes various modes of production, which appeared due to the contradictions of previous modes of production. Though the development of different societies follows different sequences, Marx distinguished several major stages of historical development.

Primitive Communism: The primitive communism is the first stage of human society. Small communities depended on hunting, fishing, gathering and basic agriculture to survive. Productive forces were not well-developed and the private ownership of productive resources did not exist.

The land and natural resources were mostly communally owned and production was aimed not at profit but at immediate consumption. There was little social inequality since productive resources were shared by all community members. Gradually with the development of technologies, private ownership and social differentiation appear, thus, forming the next stage of development.

Slave Mode of Production: The development of agriculture and economic activity led to the formation of societies with the institution of slavery. This mode of production presupposes the control of the productive resources and labour of slaves by the landowners. Slaves were considered as the possession and worked without having freedom or property rights. Agricultural production, mining, construction and other economic activities relied on the labour of slaves. Contradictions between the slaves' owners and slaves, along with declining productivity and political instability resulted in the decline of slave societies.

Feudal Mode of Production: After the fall of slave societies in ancient times, feudalism became the dominant mode of production in medieval Europe. Land became the main source of production, and the economic power of feudal landlords prevailed. Peasants worked the land in return for protection and limited access to agricultural resources. Even though the peasants were not slaves, they were economically dependent on the landlords and had to pay rent, labour services, and agricultural produce. The features of feudal society included limited technological innovation, local self-sufficiency, privileges, and hierarchical social structure. However, the development of trade, urbanization, markets, and innovations brought about the economic pressure that the feudal production relations could not bear.

Capitalist Mode of Production: Capitalism is the mode of production studied most extensively by Marx. This mode of production came into existence through the growth of trade, industrialization, innovations, and private ownership of productive assets.

In capitalist societies, factories, machinery, technology, financial capital, and other sources of production belong to the capitalists, while the rest of people only own their labour power. Workers sell their labour for money while capitalists earn money through production.

According to Marx, capitalism has an outstanding productive capacity. It promotes technological innovations, specialization, competition, and mass industrial production. At the same time, Marx noted several internal contradictions in capitalism including the following:

- concentration of wealth among a relatively small number of owners;
- growing economic inequality;
- exploitation of wage labour;
- periodical economic crises;

- unemployment caused by technological innovations; and
- struggle between labour and capital.

Marx believed that the contradictions would eventually create the conditions for the social transformation.

Socialist Mode of Production: Marx considered socialism a transitional stage between capitalism and communism. In socialism, the means of production will be gradually subjected to collective or public ownership.

The goal of socialism is to reduce exploitation by making sure that production is aimed at satisfying social needs instead of bringing profit to people. Economic planning, public ownership, and social equality are the expected characteristics of this stage. Marx did not propose any blueprint for socialism but viewed it as the historical result of contradictions in capitalism.

Communist Mode of Production: Communism is the final stage of historical development according to Marx's theory. In communist society, private ownership of the means of production will disappear, classes will no longer exist, and production will be organized depending on the needs of society and not on the market competition. Marx saw a society where labour will turn into a creative activity rather than a mere way to earn money. Distribution of resources will be carried out based on the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Even though it is still a theoretical stage, this is Marx's ideal of a classless exploitation-free society.

Transition Between Modes of Production: According to Marx, the transition between modes of production does not happen easily and peacefully. It happens due to contradictions that develop within the economic systems. When productive forces develop to a certain extent, they start to contradict the existing relations of production. The older social arrangements stop allowing further development and cause the rise of class struggle, politics, etc. Thus, history moves forward not because of some accidental events but because of the transformations caused by contradictions within every mode of production.

Sociological relevance of the Mode of Production: The concept of the mode of production is one of the most important analytical tools proposed by Marx. With it, he is able to explain why different eras have different political systems, laws, educational system, religions, and class structure. Marx considered institutions as parts of a larger economic system. As a

result, changes in the mode of production cause corresponding changes in all spheres of society.

This concept is also useful for sociologists when analysing current transformations. The emergence of automation, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and platforms has affected productive forces and is changing the labour market, property, employment relations, and economic inequality. It shows that the modes of production continue to develop, making the Marxist theory applicable for analyzing social and economic changes in the contemporary society.

For example, the transition from traditional retail to e-commerce platforms illustrates the impact of changing modes of production on society. The innovations in digital technologies, online payments, logistics, and artificial intelligence have changed the production and distribution. It resulted in creation of new occupations, changes in consumers' habits, new employment, and economic concentration. A Marxian analysis will interpret these changes as the effects of changing productive forces interacting with production relations.

2.2.7 Base and Superstructure

One of the key concepts of the theory of historical materialism developed by Karl Marx is the base and superstructure model. With the help of this concept, Marx described the relation between the economic structure of society and its major social institutions. He believed that the economy is the foundation of society, while the institutions such as law, politics, education, religion, and culture develop on the top of this foundation. The concept illustrates how economic relations affect many aspects of social life and contribute to maintaining or transforming of society.

Marx introduced this idea most clearly in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859), where he said that the economic structure of society forms the real basis upon which arises the legal and political superstructure and to which particular forms of social consciousness correspond.

Concept of infrastructure

The economic base, also referred to as the infrastructure, is the economic foundation of society. It includes the mode of production, which comprises forces of production and relations of production.

The economic base thus includes:

- natural resources;
- labour and labour power;
- technology and machinery;
- factories and productive assets;
- ownership of the means of production;
- relations of production among different social groups.

The base defines how products are being made, who owns productive forces and who gets the benefits of economic activity. Since any society needs to organize production in order to satisfy human needs, Marx saw the economic base as the most fundamental element of the social organization.

For example, in a capitalist society, factories, industries, financial institutions, technology, and private enterprises form the economic base. The relations between the employers and workers belong to the base as well, as they are related to the production and ownership.

Concept of Superstructure

The superstructure refers to institutions, values, beliefs, and organizations that develop on top of the economic base. Institutions regulate social life and uphold the current social order and economic structure.

The superstructure consists of:

- political system;
- government and administration;
- legal institutions and laws;
- education;
- religion;
- family;
- media;
- arts and literature;
- philosophy;
- cultural values and ideologies.

Even though all institutions have their specific social functions, Marx stated that they are affected directly or indirectly by economic organization of society.

For example, educational institutions train people for different occupations within the economy, the legal system guarantees the protection of private property and regulates economic transactions, political institutions create policies that influence production, taxation, labour relations and markets.

Base-Superstructure Relationship

Marx emphasized that the relationship between the base and the superstructure is systematic and dynamic. The economic base forms the conditions for the development of the superstructure. Any changes in the economic base will eventually result in corresponding changes in political, legal, educational, and cultural institutions. Changes in the mode of production lead to gradual adaptation of institutions in the superstructure to the new economic conditions.

Thus, the transition from feudalism to capitalism caused a lot of changes in political institutions, legal systems, educational organizations and cultural values. Privileges of feudalism gradually disappeared, constitutional states emerged, industrial education was expanded, legal systems more and more recognized private property and contractual relations necessary for capitalist production.

Similarly, the Industrial Revolution changed not only manufacturing but urban planning, transportation, education, family relations, political participation. Thus, Marx stated that the institutions of any kind cannot be understood without reference to the economic system that forms its background.

Does the Economic Base Determines the Superstructure? It is a popular misconception that Marx considered the superstructure as a passive duplication of the economic base. Such an approach distorts the understanding of Marx's theory.

Even though Marx emphasized the primacy of the economic base, he also recognized that institutions in the superstructure affect economic processes. Governments create economic policies, courts regulate property relations, educational institutions educate specialists, and scientific research contributes to technological innovations. Thus, the relationship between the base and the superstructure is mutual, though the economic base is the main determinant. Later, Marxist scholars, including Antonio Gramsci, elaborated on the importance of such elements of the superstructure as culture, education, and media in the maintenance of the existing economic system through ideological consent.

Ideology and Superstructure

The essential element of the superstructure is ideology. Marx used the term ideology to define the systems of beliefs, values, and ideas which are used to justify or legitimize existing social and economic relations. According to Marx, the dominant ideas in society are formed by the interests of economically dominant classes. Educational institutions, religious organizations, political discourse, and media promote beliefs that contribute to acceptance of existing inequalities as normal.

For example, the idea that economic success depends on individual efforts does not consider structural inequalities in access to education, money and labour market. Marxian sociologist will analyze how ideology contributes to maintaining existing class relations.

It is important to remember that Marx did not claim that all beliefs are intentionally misleading. On the contrary, he stated that ideas form in a specific historical-economic context and reflect interests connected with current production relations.

Example of Base-Superstructure Relationship: The relationship between the base and the superstructure can be explained by means of illustration. Let us assume that a country experiences digital revolution. Development of artificial intelligence, cloud computing, automation technologies leads to changes in production techniques and formation of new industries. Such changes refer to transformations of the economic base.

Then, as a result:

- new laws about digital privacy and cybersecurity are adopted;
- data science and artificial intelligence programmes are opened in universities;
- labour regulations are changed in order to regulate gig and remote employment;
- media organizations become more dependent on digital technologies;
- new attitudes towards work and employment appear.

Such changes in politics, education, law, media, and culture are adaptations of the superstructure to the new economic base.

Criticism of Base-Superstructure Model

The base-superstructure model is highly influential but it has also faced some criticism.

Some sociologists claim that Marx overestimated the importance of economic factors and underestimated the independent influence of culture, religion, politics, and education. For example, Max Weber showed that religious beliefs might affect economic behaviour, as he proved in his analysis of the Protestant ethic and capitalism.

Further, some scholars state that modern democratic institutions, legal systems, and civil society organizations determine economic organization. Public policies related to education, healthcare, environment and labour rights may substantially affect economic organization. Modern sociologists understand the relationship between the base and superstructure as more reciprocal than Marx himself described it.

Relevance of Base-Superstructure Model for Sociology

Nevertheless, despite all criticism, the base-superstructure model is one of the most important contributions of Marx to sociology. It provides a systematic approach to the analysis of the relationship between economic organization and social institutions. The model teaches sociologists to analyze how technological and economic transformations affect politics, law, education, religion, media, and culture. It makes researchers pay attention to the role of ideology in maintaining existing social relations and to the structural roots of inequality.

Indeed, the model is used in the analysis of globalization, digital capitalism, environmental policies, platform economies, corporate lobbying, labour legislation, media ownership. Even though modern societies are more complicated than Marx's society, the interaction of economic structures and social institutions remains the central focus of sociological research.

For example, the fast development of online education after COVID-19 pandemic is an example of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure. Advancement of digital infrastructure, internet technologies, cloud technologies, and communication platforms (economic base) resulted in transformation of educational institutions, teaching methods, examinations and government policies (superstructure). At the same time, reforms of education affected the skills of the workforce and economic productivity.

2.2.8 Historical Development of Society

Karl Marx believed that history of mankind can be described as a history of different modes of production. When productive forces grow,

they eventually come to contradiction with production relations, which gives rise to class struggles and formation of a new social and economic system. Hence, historical development is not accidental or determined by ideas but by economic and material changes in society. According to Karl Marx, there are several stages of historical development that have distinct modes of production, class structure and social relations.

Primitive Communism

Primitive communism is the earliest form of society. People lived in tribes and relied mostly on hunting, gathering, fishing and primitive agriculture. Productive forces in this kind of society were not developed and private ownership of the means of production was nonexistent. Everything was owned by the community and social differences did not exist. With growing of productive forces and appearance of surplus production, people started developing forms of private ownership.

Slave Society

With the development of agriculture and civilization, slave societies arose. Landowners owned not only means of production but the slaves as well, who were exploited by landowners. Society became classified between owners and slaves, which led to the appearance of one of the first kinds of class difference. Inefficiency of slave labour and growing contradictions of this system eventually caused transformation to feudalism.

Feudal Society

In the feudal mode of production, the main means of production was land. Landlords owned the land and peasants worked on them in exchange of protection and opportunity to cultivate part of the land. Economic and political power belonged to landlords and feudal relations were determined by hereditary privileges. Expansion of trade, urbanisation and technical improvements undermined feudal relations and helped emergence of capitalism.

Capitalist Society

Capitalism is the form of production that was described by Marx in details. Means of production in this kind of society are privately owned whereas workers sell their labour force in exchange for wages. Capitalism greatly enhances productive forces through industrialisation and technological and market competition. At the same time, it creates

inequalities, exploitation of labour force, concentration of wealth and economic crises. According to Marx, all these contradictions give rise to class struggle and prepare ground for the next stage of social development.

Socialist Society

Socialism is seen by Marx as a transitional stage from capitalism to communism. During this stage of historical development, ownership of major means of production passes from private individuals to society as a whole. Production is organised according to social needs rather than personal profits and efforts are made to overcome class differences and economic exploitation.

Communist Society

Communism is the last stage of development of society according to the theory of Karl Marx. It is characterised by absence of private ownership of means of production and class differences. Production in this society is conducted through cooperation and not competition and resources are distributed in accordance with the following rules “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. Marx saw communism as a classless society where humans could fully develop their abilities without exploitation.

Historical Development as a Continuous Process

Marx asserted that no mode of production is eternal. All economic systems contain contradictions that sooner or later result in transformation of a society. When productive forces are developing, they come to contradiction with existing production relations, which gives rise to class struggle and emergence of new form of production. Hence, historical development is a continuous process of change in the structure of society that is determined by material factors, rather than by ideas or political events.

Table 2.2.2 Marxian model of Historical Development of Society

Historical Stage	Means of Production	Major Classes	Principal Characteristic
Primitive Communism	Hunting, gathering, simple agriculture	No distinct classes	Collective ownership and minimal inequality

Slave Society	Agriculture based on slave labour	Slave owners and slaves	Private ownership and exploitation of slave labour
Feudal Society	Land-based agriculture	Feudal lords and peasants/serfs	Land ownership and hereditary privileges
Capitalist Society	Industrial production and private capital	Bourgeoisie and proletariat	Wage labour, surplus value and class conflict
Socialist Society	Collective/public ownership	Transitional society	Reduction of class inequality and planned production
Communist Society	Collective ownership	Classless society	Production for human needs rather than profit

2.2.9 Historical Materialism as a Theory of Social Change

Probably the most important contribution of Karl Marx to sociology is his concept of historical materialism, i.e. the explanation of social change through this theory. Unlike previous sociologists who considered social change as the product of divine will, actions of great men or spreading of ideas, Marx considered changes in material conditions of life as the major sources of social transformation.

According to Marx, each society is based on the certain mode of production. Development of productive forces such as science, technologies, labour skills eventually leads to contradictions with existing production relations. When these relations become obstacles for further development, contradictions arise within a society. They take form of a class conflict between social groups with conflicting interests.

Thus, class struggle is not accidental and temporary process but an inevitable result of contradictions within the economic system. For example, in capitalism, interests of capitalists owning means of production are fundamentally different from the interests of workers' dependent on wages. Such contradictions create pressure towards restructuring of a society.

Marx argued that social change is revolutionary, rather than evolutionary. While reforms can alter some elements of society, they do not eliminate contradictions of a certain mode of production. Only emergence

of new economic system that is capable to accommodate productive forces can bring about social transformation. Hence, transformation from feudalism to capitalism took place, because feudal production relations became inconsistent with trading, industrialisation and technological development.

Historical materialism also asserts that social institutions such as political system, law, religion and education are transformed in response to changes of economic base. With the transformation of mode of production, they gradually adapt to new economic system. Thus, social change affects all spheres of social life. However, it was never implied by Marx that the course of history is fixed or predetermined. Humans create history through their productive activity and class struggles but in the material conditions inherited from the past generations. Thus, social change happens due to the interaction of human action and structure.

For sociologists, historical materialism offers an invaluable theoretical tool for analysing long-term social changes. It allows explaining how innovations in technologies, changes in ownership, industrialisation, globalization, economic restructuring affect class relations and transform political, legal, and cultural institutions. Despite the obvious differences between contemporary societies and the societies of Marx's times, the connection between the economic organisation and social change remains one of the most relevant topics for sociologists.

2.2.10 Criticisms of Historical Materialism

There is no doubt that historical materialism gained wide recognition due to its attention to the role of economic factors in social change. However, the theory faced a number of criticisms too.

Firstly, critics claimed that the Marxist approach was based on the excessive economic determinism and the underestimation of the role of the independent factors such as culture, religion, politics, and ideology. For example, Max Weber proved the influence of religious beliefs and values on economic development.

Secondly, critics accused Marx of the portrayal of history as a chain of predetermined stages while in reality societies took different ways of development and not all of them passed through the stages described by Marx.

Thirdly, Marx predicted the collapse of capitalism due to its internal contradictions. However, despite periodic crises, capitalism showed a

high level of adaptability due to the development of technologies, labour reforms, welfare policies, etc.

Fourthly, Marx failed to see the role of the state and democracy in overcoming the contradictions in capitalist societies. Contemporary states often regulate markets, guarantee the protection of labour rights and the provision of social welfare, and thus moderate contradictions discussed by Marx.

Finally, contemporary societies are much more complex than the division between bourgeoisie and proletariat suggested by Marx. The growth of middle classes, professional specializations, service sector and the development of the knowledge economy introduced new patterns of social stratification.

Despite all these criticisms, historical materialism remains one of the most influential sociological theories.

2.2.11 Contemporary Relevance of Historical Materialism

Developed in the nineteenth century, historical materialism still provides useful insights into contemporary societies. Fast technological development, globalization, and the emergence of digital capitalism changed productive forces and labour relations worldwide. The growing automation, use of artificial intelligence, and platform-based employment demonstrate the changing role of productive forces and changes in social institutions and labour relations.

Historical materialism can be used as the analytical framework for investigating increasing economic inequality in terms of the concentration of wealth, productive property in hands of corporations, the discussion of labour rights reflect the continuing tensions between capital and labour. Similarly, global production networks reflect the way economic structures influence political decisions, migrations, environmental policies, and international relations.

Despite the fact that many specific predictions made by Marx are debatable, his main idea of the significant influence of economic organisation on social processes remained valid. Therefore, historical materialism still is a relevant sociological theory.

2.2.12 Let Us Sum Up

Historical materialism is the central tenet of Marxian sociology and the materialist explanation of historical and social change. According

to Marx, the development of society is determined primarily by the changes in the mode of production that consists of productive forces and production relations. With the further development of productive forces contradictions arise in production relations and lead to the class struggle and change in society. The concepts of mode of production and base-superstructure allow explaining how the economic organisation determines the development of political, legal, educational, religious and cultural institutions.

Marx distinguished successively developing modes of production as listed below primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism to explain the historical development of societies. Despite criticism directed at the theory, historical materialism is one of the most influential sociological perspectives. Its emphasis on the relation between the economic structures and social change allows providing useful insights into such contemporary issues as globalization, technological changes, labour relations, and economic inequalities.

2.2.13 Keywords

Historical Materialism; Dialectical Materialism; Forces of Production; Relations of Production

2.2.14 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the concept of historical materialism and discuss its significance in Marxian sociology.
2. Distinguish between dialectical materialism and historical materialism.
3. Describe the concepts of forces of production, relations of production, and mode of production.
4. Explain Marx's concept of the base and superstructure with suitable examples.
5. Critically examine historical materialism as a theory of social change, highlighting its criticisms and contemporary relevance.

Lesson 2.3 - Surplus Value and Alienation of Labour

Structure

- 2.3.1 Objectives
- 2.3.2 Introduction
- 2.3.3 Labour Theory of Value
- 2.3.4 Concept of Surplus Value
- 2.3.5 Types of Surplus Value
- 2.3.6 Surplus Value and Capitalist Exploitation
- 2.3.7 Alienation of Labour
- 2.3.8 Dimensions of Alienation
- 2.3.9 Consequences of Alienation
- 2.3.10 Alienation in Contemporary Society
- 2.3.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.3.12 Keywords
- 2.3.13 Self-Assessment Questions

2.3.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain Marx's labour theory of value.
- describe the concept and types of surplus value.
- analyse the relationship between surplus value and capitalist exploitation.
- explain the concept and dimensions of alienation of labour.
- examine the relevance of alienation in contemporary society.

2.3.2 Introduction

The surplus value theory and the alienation of labour theory are some of the most influential theories developed by Karl Marx for political economy and sociology. These theories describe how capitalism produces wealth and, at the same time, creates inequality and exploitation. Marx asserted that even though the workers are the producers of economic value via their work, they do not get the value of all the commodities they

produce. The difference between the value created by the workers and the payment they receive is taken away from the workers as profit by the owners of the means of production. This concept explains Marx's theory of surplus value.

Marx believed that capitalist production had not only the effect on the economic status of the workers but also on their connection to their work, society, and their human nature. The work in industrial societies becomes repetitive, highly specialized, and external to workers. It reduces work to earning wages rather than expressing the creative ability of human beings. This state of workers being disconnected from the products they make, the act of producing, other workers, and themselves was termed alienation by Marx.

Even though these theories were developed in the nineteenth century, they remain influential to sociological analyses of labour relations, organizational structures, income inequality, and changes in employment in the twenty-first century. This lesson focuses on the labour theory of value, surplus value concept, nature of capitalist exploitation and Marx's theory of alienation of labour.

2.3.3 Labour Theory of Value

The surplus value theory is based on Marx's labour theory of value. Marx borrowed this theory from classical economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, but he developed it in order to explain the origins of profits and the exploitation of labour.

According to labour theory of value, the labour is the source of the value of the commodities. Each commodity has the value since human labour has been expended on its creation. The amount of value created by the labour is dependent upon the amount of socially necessary labour time needed to produce that commodity in normal conditions of production and the average level of skills and technologies available in society.

Marx distinguishes between use value and exchange value.

- The use value connotes usefulness of the commodity for the satisfaction of human needs. Food can satisfy the hunger, clothes protect from cold, and a book helps to learn something.
- The exchange value denotes the value of the commodity when it is exchanged for some other commodities in the market. Marx asserts that the exchange value is finally determined by the amount of socially necessary labour embodied in the commodity.

Marx argued that labour is a special commodity that has the ability to create the value that is higher than its cost. Workers receive wages that are enough for themselves and their families, but in the course of the working day they create the value that exceeds the value of their wages. This surplus value becomes the source of profit of the capitalists.

To clarify this idea, let us consider a simple example. Imagine that a worker is paid ₹1,000 for a working day. During this day the worker creates goods whose total value is ₹2,000. Taking into account the cost of raw materials and machinery, the worker receives only the agreed wage, and the rest of the value is profit for the employer. Marx called this excess surplus value.

It should be noted that Marx does not assert that individual prices always exactly coincide with labour time. Market prices can vary due to demand, supply, competition, and other factors. However, Marx claims that labour is still the main source of value in the production process.

The labour theory of value gave the basis for the development of Marx's criticism of capitalism. Marx was able to explain with its help how the profits are produced and why economic inequality exists even if the workers receive wages for their labour. This theory also gave the basis for the surplus value and exploitation theories that will be discussed below.

2.3.4 Concept of Surplus Value

The surplus value theory is one of the most important theories proposed by Karl Marx for political economy and sociology. It explains the source of profit in a capitalist economy and gives the basis for Marx's analysis of exploitation. According to Marx, the profit is not produced through buying and selling commodities; rather, the profit is produced because the workers produce more value than they receive as the payment.

Marx argues that workers sell not their labour but labour power, that is, the ability to work. Capitalist buys this labour power by paying wages. However, during the working day workers create the value that exceeds the value of their wages. The difference between the value created by workers and the wages paid to them is called surplus value.

Therefore, the surplus value may be defined as:

The excess of the value created by workers over the wages they receive, which is appropriated by the capitalist as profit.

According to Marx, the capitalist owns the means of production, such as factories, machinery and raw materials, and so owns the commodities

produced by workers. Even though the workers create the new value via their labour, they receive only the part of it as the payment. The rest of the value belongs to the capitalist.

Necessary Labour and Surplus Labour

Marx explains the surplus value by distinguishing the necessary labour from the surplus labour. Necessary labour is the part of the working day in which workers produce value equal to their wages. In other words, it is the labour necessary for covering the costs of maintenance of the worker and his or her ability to work.

The surplus labour is the extra work that the worker performs after necessary labour is offered. During this period, workers continue to produce the value, but they do not receive any pay for it. The surplus labour results in surplus value for the capitalist.

For example, imagine that a worker is hired for eight-hour working day. If the value of the daily wage of the worker is produced in the first four hours, the rest four hours produce surplus value. The worker works the whole working day, but is paid for the value produced by the necessary labour, whereas the value produced by the surplus labour goes to the employer as profit.

How Surplus Value is Produced

According to Marx, surplus value is produced due to the special nature of labour power. Labour power differs from machinery and raw materials by being able to create value during production.

The production of surplus value is produced through the following process:

1. Investment of capital into labour power through payment of wages to workers.
2. Using the means of production to produce products and services.
3. Creation of value in excess of the value of wages during production.
4. Sales of products in the market.
5. Difference between the value created by workers and wages is surplus value.

Surplus value allows for the accumulation of capital and expansion of production. The regular appropriation of surplus value constitutes the basis of capitalist accumulation.

Significance of Surplus Value

Marx considered surplus value to be an essential element that explains the operation of capitalism. It helps to understand:

- origins of profit;
- capital accumulation;
- concentration of wealth;
- economic inequality; and
- exploitative nature of capitalism.

Contrary to the popular notion of profit being the compensation for entrepreneurship, Marx claimed that it comes from unpaid labour of workers. Therefore, surplus value becomes a significant concept in the critique of capitalism performed by Marx and explained in the sections below.

2.3.5 Types of Surplus Value

According to Marx, capitalists continuously seek to maximize the profit, which is produced through the appropriation of surplus value. It can be made using different ways of manipulating the ratio between necessary labour and surplus labour. There are two main types of surplus value defined by Marx viz. absolute surplus value and relative surplus value.

Absolute Surplus Value

Absolute surplus value is gained through extension of the length of the working day while the wages remain constant. In case when workers spend more time producing value of wages than it is necessary, the value of surplus labour will become higher and the surplus value of the capitalist will increase. For example, if workers used to work 8 hours per day and the working day was increased to 10 hours while wages were not changed, then the two extra hours will go into surplus labour. Thus, the capitalist receives extra surplus value.

Extensive use of these techniques was common at the early stage of the development of industrial capitalism. Employers used to extend working hours, employ women and children and deprive workers of rights. As a result, this practice became one of the main reasons for labour protests and legislative regulations of working hours.

Relative Surplus Value

Relative surplus value is generated through increase in labour productivity and not through extending the working day. Advances in technology, machinery, science management and division of labour allow workers to produce the value of their wages in less time. Thus, a greater part of the working day turns into surplus labour without changing the length of working hours. For example, if due to technical advancements the worker is able to produce the value of his wages in 3 hours instead of 4, the rest of the hours will create surplus value without increasing the length of the working day.

Marx claimed that in modern capitalism the generation of relative surplus value takes place due to the technological innovations and increase in efficiency.

Table 2.3.1 Comparing Absolute and Relative Surplus Value

Basis	Absolute Surplus Value	Relative Surplus Value
Method	Extending the working day	Increasing labour productivity
Working Hours	Increase	Remain largely unchanged
Source of Additional Surplus	Longer surplus labour time	Reduced necessary labour time
Means Used	Longer hours and greater work intensity	Technology, mechanization, specialization, and improved production methods
Typical of	Early industrial capitalism	Modern industrial and technological capitalism

Both types of surplus value help capitalists to increase profits and expand the unpaid labour. While early capitalism was based on the extension of working hours, modern capitalist economies use technological advancement to create relative surplus value.

2.3.6 Surplus Value and Exploitation of Workers

Marx considered surplus value to be the foundation of exploitation under capitalism. Marx stated that workers are not exploited because they are unpaid, but because they receive wages less than the value created by them in the process of production. In capitalist society workers are

deprived of the means of production and have to sell their labour power in order to earn wages. Capitalist buys labour power through the payment of wages but owns everything that is produced in the course of the working day. The extra value created by workers is called surplus value and belongs to the capitalist.

Marx opined, exploitation is a structural phenomenon and it does not mean that the employers exploit their employees personally. This exploitative system is inherent to the very capitalist mode of production. So long as there is private ownership of means of production and workers have to work in order to earn a living, surplus value will continue to be produced.

Regular extraction of surplus value allows capitalists to accumulate wealth, develop new technologies, expand production and increase economic power. Workers remain dependent on the wages, thus creating permanent disproportion between capital and labour. This unequal relationship is the basis of class structure in capitalist society.

Marx thought that competition among capitalists increases exploitation. In order to reduce production costs and maximize profits, employers need high labour productivity, technological innovations, low labour costs and effective production processes. These competitive pressures usually result in increase in workloads, unemployment and restriction of wages.

Though labour legislation, trade unions and social benefits have made work in many countries better off, debates on wage inequality, insecure employment, contract and temporary work and so-called 'gig economy' keep on touching upon the problems discovered by Marx. Therefore, the theory of surplus value remains an essential analytical tool in explaining the labour relations in contemporary society.

Extraction of surplus value has effects on many spheres. Marx believed that the capitalist production impacts not only economic but social and psychological life of workers by reducing labour to a commodity. This produces a phenomenon known as alienation, which is one of the most famous concepts in Marxian sociology.

2.3.7 Alienation of Labour

One of the main concepts of Karl Marx's theory and a significant contribution to the field of sociology is alienation. Where the theory of surplus value accounts for economic exploitation of workers, the theory

of alienation reflects social and psychological consequences of capitalism. Marx believed that, under capitalism, workers get progressively alienated from the products they produce, the work itself, their fellow workers, and finally their own humanity.

By alienation, we mean a situation when individuals are disconnected from those aspects of their lives to which they should normally relate. According to Marx, labor under capitalism is not just an activity that enables people to earn their living but is a form of expression of one's abilities and personality development. However, in a capitalist economy, labor is perceived mostly as an activity needed to earn wages.

This concept was elaborated by Karl Marx in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In capitalism, the labor process turns into a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market. Workers have no control over their products, their production process, and the use of the products. As a consequence, work becomes monotonous, externally controlled, and uninteresting to the workers.

Alienation is not only the feeling of discontent; it is a structural condition caused by the organization of the capitalist production process. Alienation is a consequence of private ownership of the means of production, division of labor, and separation of workers from the product of their labor. According to Marx, alienation has serious consequences on the life of people. It makes work a mere mechanized routine, weakens the feeling of creativity and self-respect, and provides little opportunity for personal development. Instead of controlling work process, workers become controlled by the process of production.

The concept of alienation is relevant in our contemporary society. Repetitive work in factories, standardization of work in offices, automation of production process, and digitally managed platforms restrict workers' control over the process of work and decision-making. Although modern workplaces are not similar to the nineteenth-century factories, dissatisfaction with work, lack of control, stress connected with work, and low opportunities for expressing creativity still make the concept of alienation an important sociological paradigm.

2.3.8 Dimensions of Alienation

Marx suggested that alienation under capitalism does not manifest itself in just one aspect of the work process but covers multiple aspects of human life. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx

revealed four interconnected dimensions of alienation emerging as a result of organization of capitalist production.

Alienation from the Product of Labour

The first form of alienation is alienation of workers from the products they create. Under capitalism, the commodities and services produced by workers are the property of owners of the means of production, but not workers themselves. After the end of the production process, workers have no right of ownership or control over the finished product.

That is why the product of labor takes the form of some kind of alien power over workers. The more laborers produce, the wealthier capitalists become. The product, created by their efforts, turns into an object, with respect to which workers have no authority at all.

Alienation from the Process of Production

Workers are also alienated from the process of production. In capitalist industries, the nature of work process, its speed, working hours, and methods of production are usually determined by the management and not by the workers themselves.

The growing division of labor often turns work process into a repetitive process involving narrowly specialized tasks. Labor process becomes compulsory process needed to earn wages, rather than a meaningful human activity.

Alienation from Fellow Workers

In addition to alienation from their work and its results, workers get alienated even from each other. Competitive labor market sometimes turns cooperative process of labor into the process of struggle for jobs, advancement in career, and salaries. Limited opportunities of participating in decision-making and poor social relations within the workplace make it hard to build solidarity among workers and strengthen the position of employers.

Alienation from Human Potential

This kind of alienation is the highest form. Only humans can think creatively, plan activities, and actively change the world around through labor. These capabilities make labor of humans unique in comparison with labor of other living creatures. However, under capitalism, labor becomes

not a way of self-development but just the way of earning money. Workers have little chance to show their creativity, independence, and initiative. That is why they get alienated from their own human nature, or in Marx's terms "species-being". Instead of developing oneself, workers see labor as a kind of necessity imposed by economic conditions. The four dimensions of alienation may be summarized as detailed in Table 2.3.2.

Thus, alienation is not limited to the economic exploitation of workers. It includes such important aspects of workers' activity as relation to their work process, relation to colleagues, and relation to one's own identity. To overcome alienation, according to Marx, it is necessary to change the organization of production and ownership, and not improve working conditions.

Table 2.3.2: Dimensions of alienation

Dimension	Nature of Alienation
Alienation from the product	Workers do not own or control the goods they produce.
Alienation from the production process	Workers have little control over how work is organized and performed.
Alienation from fellow workers	Competitive working conditions weaken cooperation and solidarity.
Alienation from species-being	Labour ceases to be a creative activity and becomes merely a means of earning wages.

2.3.9 Consequences of Alienation

According to Marx, alienation does not affect workers only. It influences the proper functioning of the entire society. Being a mechanical activity carried out for wages only, labour has significant impacts on workers' motivation, social interactions, and overall life quality. Hence, it is possible to identify numerous consequences of alienation both economic, social, and psychological.

One of the main consequences of alienation is the lack of job satisfaction. Workers who have little control over their jobs and do not own the products of their work see their work as an obligatory routine activity. This results in monotony of the work. Alienation also hinders the development of creativity and personality. According to Marx, productive

activity should be the source of development of workers' talents and creative expression. However, highly specialized and repetitive activities do not provide sufficient possibilities for innovation and self-fulfillment.

Another consequence of alienation is the weakening of social interactions. Competition in labour markets and hierarchical structure of enterprises can discourage cooperation and promote individualism. It weakens solidarity and makes the collective actions more difficult.

Alienation can also lead to psychological stress and emotional dissatisfaction. Although Marx did not analyze mental well-being in terms of modern psychology, he believed that work under the control of others is the source of frustration and loss of self-direction and purposefulness. Studies devoted to work-related stress, burnouts, and job dissatisfaction draw attention to these problems.

On the societal level, alienation increases inequality. While workers generate wealth, its ownership and control remains in the hands of a comparatively small number of capitalists. The uneven distribution of wealth and power is the source of class division and social conflict. According to Marx, alienation is the inevitable phenomenon of capitalist mode of production. Thus, the total elimination of alienation requires structural changes in the system of production and ownership.

2.3.10 Alienation in Contemporary Society

Although Marx elaborated the idea of alienation in the nineteenth century, many sociologists find this notion is useful in understanding the issues of contemporary society. While the nature of work has changed because of the progress of technology and the change in employment, the concerns about worker's autonomy, job satisfaction, and labour control remain.

In many sectors, workers perform specialized jobs with low participation in decision-making. While automation and digitalization have made the process of production more productive, in some sectors, it has decreased the opportunity for workers' creativity and independent judgment. The growing popularity of gig economy introduced new types of employment involving short-term contracts and digital platforms. Though this type of work provides some degree of freedom, it involves income uncertainties, lack of job security, and algorithmic management, under which workers have little control over the allocation of their work and performance assessment.

Remote work and digital communication technologies also changed the process of interactions at the workplace. While providing additional opportunities, these innovations have reduced the possibilities of face-to-face interaction and caused isolation in some cases. However, unlike the workplaces analyzed by Marx, contemporary workplaces differ considerably. Modern labour laws, trade unions, social protection measures, and occupational safety regulations have improved the working conditions in many countries. Moreover, knowledge-based professions often give more opportunities for creativity, skills acquisition, and participation in decision-making than factory work typical of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the notion of alienation formulated by Marx remains a useful tool of analysis of the relations between work, well-being of people, and social structure. It prompts sociologists to investigate not only the economic effects but also the quality of work, workers' autonomy, and other human aspects of different production systems.

2.3.11 Let Us Sum Up

Theories of surplus value and alienation of labour constitute the foundation of Marx's critique of capitalism. Applying the labour theory of value, Marx argues that workers generate more value than receive as wages and this extra value, known as the surplus value, is appropriated by the capitalists as profits. He distinguishes absolute and relative surplus values and believes that constant generation of surplus value constitutes the basis of capitalist accumulation and inequality.

Marx also explains why capitalism causes alienation, making workers separate from the products of their labour, from the process of production, their co-workers, and themselves, their human potentials. Although developed in the nineteenth century, the concepts of surplus value and alienation remain extremely useful in analysis of contemporary issues related to organization of work, labour relations, technological change, and quality of work.

2.3.12 Keywords

Labour Theory of Value, Surplus Value, Necessary Labour, Surplus Labour, Alienation, Species-Being.

2.3.13 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain Marx's labour theory of value and discuss its relationship with the theory of surplus value.
2. What is surplus value? Distinguish between absolute surplus value and relative surplus value.
3. Explain how surplus value forms the basis of capitalist exploitation according to Karl Marx.
4. Discuss Marx's concept of alienation of labour and explain its four dimensions.
5. Examine the relevance of Marx's theory of alienation in understanding work and employment in contemporary society.

Lesson 2.4 - Class Conflict

Structure

- 2.4.1 Objectives
- 2.4.2 Introduction
- 2.4.3 Concept of Social Class
- 2.4.4 Theory of Class Conflict
- 2.4.5 Class Consciousness and Revolution
- 2.4.6 Contributions of Karl Marx to Sociology
- 2.4.7 Criticisms of Marxian Sociology
- 2.4.8 Contemporary Relevance of Marxian Sociology
- 2.4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.4.10 Keywords
- 2.4.11 Self-Assessment Questions

2.4.1 Objectives

After learning this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain Marx's concept of social class.
- discuss the theory of class conflict and its significance in social change.
- illustrate the concepts of class consciousness and revolution.
- appreciate the contributions and criticisms of Marxian sociology.
- analyze the relevance of Marxist ideas in the contemporary society.

2.4.2 Introduction

The theory of class conflict plays a pivotal role in the sociological thinking of Karl Marx. Whereas historical materialism elucidates the evolutionary process of societal development through changes in the mode of production, class conflict provides an explanation of how the evolution takes place. As per Marx, every class society is marked by conflicts emerging out of unequal possession and control of productive assets.

Marx repudiated the idea that society is essentially harmonious and consensus-based. Rather he argued that there exists inherent opposition between the interests of various social classes. The classes which own the

means of production seek to preserve their dominance in economic and political spheres whereas the others try to secure better living standards and control over production. The resulting struggle is the fundamental force shaping history.

In the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx highlighted this perspective when he asserted that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. Through this quote, he implied that the evolution of society can only be understood in the context of the conflict between dominating and dominated classes.

This lesson discusses Marx’s concept of social class, nature of class conflict in capitalist society, emergence of class consciousness, the importance of revolution in social transformation and contributions and relevance of Marxian sociology.

2.4.3 Concept of Social Class

The concept of social class is at the core of Marxist approach to society. Unlike other systems of stratification based on ascriptive criteria like birth, caste, religion etc., Marx defined class on the basis of the economic relations of an individual with the means of production. According to Marx, a social class refers to a group of individuals occupying a similar position in the economic structure of society. The members of a particular social class share common economic interests because they have similar relation with productive assets including land, industries, machinery, money and technology.

Table 2.4.1 Karl Marx and Max Weber on Social Class

Karl Marx	Max Weber
Class is based primarily on ownership of the means of production.	Class is based on market situation and economic opportunities.
Economic factors are the principal basis of inequality.	Economic position is important but status and power also influence inequality.
Society is mainly classified into opposing classes.	Society contains multiple classes and status groups.
Class conflict drives historical change.	Social change results from the interaction of class, status, and power.

It means that ownership and not income and occupation alone defines one's class position. On the one hand, those owning the means of production belong to one class and on the other hand, those who only own their labour power belong to another class. In fact, for Marx, class was an objective social relationship rather than a mere tool of classification. One's class position determines not only his economic but also political and cultural chances.

Major Classes in Capitalist Society

Marx argued that capitalist society is characterized mainly by two classes.

Bourgeoisie: The bourgeoisie or capitalist class owns the means of production. It includes industries, banks, commercial organizations, machinery, land and technology. As a result of this, the bourgeoisie controls production and gains the surplus value produced by labor. The capitalist class exerts considerable influence over political institutions, markets, investment and economic policies. According to Marx, its primary aim is capital accumulation through the expansion of production and profit making.

Proletariat: The proletarians or working class comprise of individuals who do not own the means of production and depend on sale of their labour power for earning wages. The workers directly participate in the process of production but have no control over productive assets or the products of their labor. This makes them economically dependent and places them in an inferior position in capitalist society. Marx argued that although the workers receive wages, it represents only a part of the value they create. The remaining value is appropriated by the capitalist in the form of surplus value leading to exploitation.

Other Social Classes: Though Marx focused on the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, he acknowledged the existence of intermediate groups including:

- small traders,
- artisans,
- farmers,
- petty entrepreneurs,
- professionals, and
- property owners on small scale.

Marx called many of these groups as petty bourgeoisie. But Marx was of the opinion that the development of capitalism would ultimately reduce the significance of these intermediary classes. Through competition, technological change and concentration of capital, many small producers will either join the capitalist class or become wage earners.

Class and Social Inequality

Marx held that class is the main cause of inequality in capitalist societies. The ownership of productive assets enables the bourgeoisie to control wealth, political power and economic opportunities whereas the proletariat depends on wages. This implies that class differences are reflected in many aspects of social life, such as:

- income and wealth;
- educational opportunities;
- political involvement;
- living standards;
- job security; and
- healthcare and other resources.

Social inequality for Marx is not the outcome of individual differences in abilities or efforts but the result of class differences in the ownership of productive assets.

2.4.4 Theory of Class Conflict

The theory of class conflict is one of the most significant contributions of Marx to sociology. According to Marx, the conflict between social classes is the driving force of historical development and social transformation. Class conflict occurs due to the opposition in the interests of different classes. In capitalist society, the bourgeoisie tries to maximize profits by extracting the surplus value whereas the proletariat aims at getting higher wages, better working conditions, shorter working hours and economic security. Since these objectives cannot be achieved simultaneously, conflict emerges.

Conflict is not a question of individuals' personalities but is structural in nature. The individual employer may behave quite fair in his/her treatment of the worker but the employer remains under pressure to maximize the profits. The same is true about workers seeking better conditions since their existence depends upon wages. Therefore, the cause of the conflict

is in the organization of capitalist production but not in the intentions of particular individuals.

Economic Roots of Class Conflict

Marx found the roots of class conflict in the ownership of the means of production.

Under capitalism:

- capitalists own the productive means;
- workers own their labor power only;
- workers create the surplus value; and
- this value is expropriated by capitalists.

These relationships create the source of tension between the two classes. The capitalist tries to increase his/her income through the improvement of productivity, reduction of production costs, use of labor-saving innovations or wage restraint. And workers demand better compensation and working conditions. These contradictory aims create an economic conflict.

Forms of Class Conflict

Marx recognized that class conflict could be manifested in different ways depending upon the conditions existing at the particular time.

The forms of economic conflict are:

- demand for higher wages;
- decrease of working time;
- improvement of working conditions;
- job security;
- bargaining; and
- strike

The forms of political conflict are:

- the development of labor movement;
- formation of workers' parties;
- legislation on the protection of workers;
- enlargement of voters' rights; and
- policy conflict

Prolonged economic and political conflicts may result in revolutionary changes in society.

Development of Class Conflict

Marx assumed that the development of class conflict is gradual and not abrupt. In the initial stages of the development of capitalism the workers can be exploited by the owner but individually without understanding the structural causes. With the growth of capitalist production, however, the similar conditions of exploitation unite workers. We can speak about the following sequence of the development of class conflict:

1. Economic contradictions due to the unequal ownership of the means of production;
2. The similar experiences of exploitation;
3. The growth of class consciousness;
4. Organization of the class; and
5. Political and social struggle.

According to Marx, the degree of the intensity of class conflict depends on the level of economic inequality and the growth of class consciousness of workers.

Polarization of Classes

According to Marx, capitalism generates the polarization of classes. The big companies tend to buy smaller firms and thus accumulate wealth and productive means. The development of technology and market competition deprives many small businessmen of economic independence. Thus, society splits into people who own the productive means and those who work for the payment of wages. This polarization increases the class conflict since workers see the inequality and realize their common interests better.

Class Conflict as the Driving Force of Historical Process

According to Marx, class conflict leads to the emergence of new stages in history.

For instance:

- class conflict between slaves and owners of slaves brought down the slave society;
- class conflict between feudal lords and emerging commercial classes led to the appearance of capitalism; and
- class conflict between capitalists and workers will lead to socialism in Marx's view.

Social change is not a consequence of ideas or reforming activities of politicians but of conflicts created by contradictions in the economic structure of society. Therefore, Marx viewed conflict as the engine of history which makes society overcome outdated economic relations and move forward to new forms of social organization.

2.4.5 Class Consciousness and Revolution

The simple economic inequality cannot bring about social changes according to Marx. First of all, workers have to become aware of their common interest and understand the structural reasons of their exploitation. This awareness is called class consciousness. Marx differentiated class in itself (Klasse an sich) and class for itself (Klasse für sich). The former is a set of people occupying similar economic position but unaware of their common interests. For example, workers employed by different firms may feel the problems of low wages and poor working conditions without understanding that these problems are caused by the capitalist mode of production.

The class for itself appears when workers understand their common interests and begin to organize. They try to improve their working conditions and challenge economic relations in society through trade unions, labor and political organizations. The contradictions of capitalism promote the development of class consciousness. Inequality, crises, unemployment and exploitation stimulate workers to recognize their experience and unite. When class consciousness develops, conflict turns political and organized. Marx believed that this process would result in social revolution and the establishment of socialism.

Marx defined revolution as not just the violent political activity but the transformation of the economic structure of society. It involves the change of the ownership of the productive means and the establishment of new social relations on the basis of collective ownership. According to Marx, the transition from capitalism to communism will require a temporary period often referred to as the dictatorship of the proletariat. This phase is characterized by the political domination of the working class which uses the power to destroy capitalist institutions and organize new economic system. Marx considered this period as transitional but not stable one. It will eventually lead to the classless and stateless communist society. Though Marx's prediction of proletarian revolution has not come true as he expected, the theory of class consciousness and collective action

influences greatly the researches of labor movements, trade unions, social protests and political mobilization.

2.4.6 Contributions of Karl Marx to Sociology

Among the creators of classical sociology, Karl Marx stands out prominently. While Marx's research mainly focused on the analysis of capitalism and social change, he has greatly contributed to the development of sociology as well as economics, politics, history and cultural studies. Here we will discuss some of his contributions to sociology.

Conflict Perspective in Sociology

One of Marx's major contributions to sociology is the idea of conflict perspective that views society as a place of conflicting interests as opposed to the society based only on consensus and cooperation. According to Marx, the inequality in ownership of productive resources gives rise to conflicts between the various social classes thus making conflict a natural phenomenon in society.

This perspective presented an alternative to the theories that emphasized social integration and order. Later on it became a basis for the development of modern conflict theory and inspired the works of such sociologists as Ralf Dahrendorf and Lewis Coser.

Historical Materialism

Another important contribution of Marx is the theory of historical materialism that explains the social change via transformations of the mode of production. While focusing on material factors instead of the ideological ones, Marx provided the framework for systematic analysis of societies' development. Historical materialism directed the sociological attention to the economic structures, production systems and class relations as the main factors influencing historical development.

Theory of Social Class

Marx formulated the theory of social class based on the ownership of the means of production. Unlike the previous classification of classes based on the origin or legal status, Marx viewed class as the economic relation arising in production. His analysis of the bourgeoisie, proletariat and class struggle remains one of the most influential approaches to the analysis of social stratification and inequality.

Analysis of Capitalism

Marx conducted a detailed analysis of capitalism, which turned out to be one of his major intellectual accomplishments. He explained how capitalism stimulates the development of industries, innovations and economic growth while at the same time causing exploitation, inequality, unemployment and regular economic crises. Discussions on globalization, multinational companies, labour markets and income inequality continue to rely on Marx's analysis of capitalist production.

Concepts of Surplus Value and Alienation

The concepts of surplus value and alienation formulated by Marx reveal the economic and human implications of capitalist production. They widened the scope of sociological analysis showing that economic systems not only affect wealth distribution but also the relations between people, creativity, identity and welfare. They are important in the sociology of work, industrial sociology, organizational studies and labour economics.

Contribution to Modern Sociological Theory

Marxian ideas have contributed to the formation of the following theoretical directions in sociology:

- Neo-Marxism;
- Critical theory of the Frankfurt School;
- World-systems theory;
- Dependency theory;
- Political economy; and
- Modern conflict theory.

These approaches have helped to extend Marx's ideas to analyze the role of culture, education, media, globalization, imperialism and ecology.

Sociology as a Critical Discipline

Marxist argued that sociology should not just describe society but also critically analyze the structural sources of inequality and injustice. Such approach encouraged sociologists to investigate the relations of power, exploitation and institutional inequality thus creating sociology as a discipline able to contribute to the social understanding and reform.

2.4.7 Criticisms of Marxian Sociology

Despite its enormous influence, Marxian sociology faces several criticisms. First of all, this approach can be criticized for its economic determinism. According to critics, Marx attached too much importance to the economic factors while neglecting the independent impact of such factors as religion, culture, education, ethnicity, gender and political institutions. For example, Max Weber proved that religious ideas can also affect economic behavior and social change.

Another criticism relates to Marx's prediction regarding the inevitable collapse of capitalism. The capitalist societies have experienced considerable transformation due to the introduction of labor legislation, social security programs, innovations, democracy and regulation of the market. As a result, capitalism was able to adapt to new conditions and did not collapse like Marx predicted.

Marx also has been criticized for simplification of social stratification in terms of two major classes. The contemporary society includes managers, professionals, entrepreneurs, service-sector workers and an expanding middle class, whose interests cannot be easily classified according to the simple scheme of bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Critics also claim that Marx neglected the role of the state. Instead of acting in interests of the capitalist class, modern democratic states regulate the markets, protect labor rights, provide social welfare and decrease economic inequalities through the public policy. Feminist sociologists noted that Marx paid too little attention to gender relations, domestic unpaid labor and unequal situation of women in both family and workplace.

Finally, globalization, digital technologies, artificial intelligence and knowledge-based economy have changed the pattern of production in such a way that cannot be adequately explained by the Marx's analysis. This means that some aspects of his analysis should be revised to explain contemporary societies. However, sociologists claim that these criticisms do not reduce the importance of Marx's contributions. On the contrary, they advocate the need to develop and extend Marxian theory under the changed historical conditions.

2.4.8 Contemporary Relevance of Marxian Sociology

Although Karl Marx lived in the 19th century, his ideas remain very relevant for understanding the economic and social problems of the 21st

century. One of the most noticeable features of the contemporary society is the persistence of economic inequality. The concentration of wealth in hands of relatively few sections of the society as well as increasing inequality in income and standard of life reflects the problems that were highlighted more than a hundred years ago by Marx. These inequalities continue to affect access to education, health care, housing and employment opportunities.

The development of global capitalism has increased the relevance of Marx's analysis even more. Multinational companies, global supply chains and financial markets show how the production and capital work beyond the borders of the country. The inequality in distribution of economic benefits among the countries and social groups remains an important field of sociological investigation.

Marx's ideas can be useful for analyzing the changes in the world of work. Automation, artificial intelligence, digital platforms and gig economy have changed the employment relations. While this brings new opportunities, it leads to concern regarding the job insecurity, contract employment, inequality in wages and algorithmic management. These problems continue to raise the questions about the ownership, control and labour relations.

Marx's theory of alienation is still relevant in many workplaces of the modern world. Employees working in highly standardized, repetitive, or digitally controlled jobs might lack autonomy and possibilities to be creative. Even though working conditions have greatly improved in many fields, questions regarding the work-life balance and well-being of employees are still relevant and reflect issues talked about by Marx.

Researchers studying environmental issues have also been influenced by Marxian perspectives. They discuss how constant striving for growth and profit causes resource depletion, environmental degradation, and climate change. Such researches continue concerns raised by Marx regarding the connection between the economic system and its wider consequences.

Finally, Marx's focus on inequality, power, and structural analysis has affected contemporary sociology as well. Researchers analyzing globalization, labor migration, corporate power, consumer culture, digital capitalism, and social movements rely on Marxian concepts to understand social changes that occur in the contemporary society.

Despite the fact that many aspects of contemporary capitalism have changed since the nineteenth century, problems like increasing income

inequality, concentrated corporate power, precarious work, labor migration, digital platform work, and environmental degradation still require Marxist analysis. Therefore, Marx's ideas remain an essential resource of knowledge regarding structural foundations of our modern society and its connections between the economic organization, power, and social change.

2.4.9 Let Us Sum Up

Karl Marx described society using such terms as class, conflict, and historical process. According to him, people can be classified into social classes depending on their ownership of the means of production, which creates class conflicts being a key force of the historical process. With time, class consciousness emerges among workers, who start fighting for structural changes within the existing social order.

Marx's theories of historical materialism, surplus value, alienation, and class conflict have greatly influenced sociological and several other disciplines. Despite the criticism of some aspects of his theories that emphasized economic factors and even predicted some events wrongly, Marxian sociology still plays an important role in the analysis of inequality, globalization, labor relations, and capitalism.

2.4.10 Keywords

Social Class, Bourgeoisie, Class Consciousness, Class Conflict, Revolution

2.4.11 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain Karl Marx's concept of social class and distinguish between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.
2. Discuss Marx's theory of class conflict as an explanation of social change.
3. What is class consciousness? Explain its role in Marx's theory of revolution.
4. Evaluate the major contributions of Karl Marx to sociological thought.
5. Critically examine the criticisms and contemporary relevance of Marxian sociology.

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UNIT – III

Émile Durkheim

Introduction

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) is an outstanding figure in the formation of sociology as an academic discipline. Being a follower of Auguste Comte and working in parallel with Karl Marx and Max Weber, Durkheim gave rise to the scientific approach to the study of society. According to him, society exists independently of individuals, having its own objective reality which shapes people's behavior.

In this unit, we will explore the sociological theories propounded by Durkheim through his major works including the theory of the division of labour and the evolution of social solidarity, the principles of scientific methodology of sociology in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Durkheim's sociological explanation of the phenomenon of religion and the study of suicide as a sociological phenomenon.

Objectives

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- Explain the life and intellectual contributions of Émile Durkheim.
- Elucidate Durkheim's theory of division of labour and social solidarity.
- Understand the principles of the scientific method in sociology proposed by Durkheim.
- Analyze Durkheim's sociological interpretation of religion and its functions.
- Explain the sociological causes and types of suicide identified by Durkheim.
- Evaluate Durkheim's contribution to the development of sociological tradition.

Unit Structure

Lesson 3.1 Émile Durkheim: Life and Contributions

Lesson 3.2 Division of Labour

Lesson 3.3 Rules of Sociological Method

Lesson 3.4 Religion and Society

Lesson 3.5 Study of Suicide

Lesson 3.1 - Émile Durkheim: Life and Contributions

Structure

- 3.1.1 Objectives
- 3.1.2 Introduction
- 3.1.3 Life and Intellectual Background
- 3.1.4 Intellectual Influences on Durkheim
- 3.1.5 Durkheim's Contribution to Sociology
- 3.1.6 Major Works
- 3.1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.1.8 Keywords
- 3.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

3.1.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the life and intellectual background of Émile Durkheim;
- identify his major sociological works; and
- explain his contribution to the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline.

3.1.2 Introduction

Émile Durkheim is considered the father of modern sociology. His work turned sociology from the philosophy into a systematic and scientific discipline. Durkheim claimed that society has characteristics independent of individual psychology. Society has its own collective normative system which shapes the behavior of individuals. His research helped to establish new approaches to studying society and prove the objectivity of social phenomena.

The works of Durkheim were focused on the questions related to social order, cohesion, morality, religion, social change. His sociological theories remain widely used in sociology, anthropology, education, criminology, political science and organizational studies.

3.1.3 Life and Intellectual Background

David Émile Durkheim was born on 15 April 1858 in Épinal, France, into a Jewish family of scholars. Although being brought up in a religious tradition, Durkheim's interest shifted from religion to philosophy and the scientific study of society. Durkheim studied at the famous École Normale Supérieure in Paris and was educated in philosophy, history, psychology and social sciences. The changes that took place in nineteenth-century Europe including the industrialization, urbanization and decline of traditional institutions, has attracted his attention and motivated him to research the mechanisms of maintaining social order in rapidly changing society.

During his academic career, Durkheim worked at the University of Bordeaux where he founded one of the first university departments of sociology. Later, he moved to the University of Paris (Sorbonne). There he helped to improve the status of sociology as a scientific discipline.

3.1.4 Intellectual Influences on Durkheim

The sociological theories of Durkheim were developed under the influence of the general intellectual and social transformation of nineteenth-century Europe. Several thinkers and historical trends stimulated Durkheim in the development of his unique sociological perspective.

Among the early influences on Durkheim we can mention the philosophy of Positivism by Auguste Comte. Comte claimed that society should be studied in the scientific way, by means of observation and empirical investigation, not by speculation or theology. Comte's scientific approach and the idea that the proper object of sociology is social facts were accepted and developed by Durkheim.

The writings of Montesquieu also had some impact on Durkheim's understanding of society. Montesquieu believed that laws and institutions are determined by social and natural environment, not individual preferences. This led to the idea of studying social institutions in their wider social context.

Like Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasised the importance of collective nature of society and collective moral life. Durkheim shared his idea of the importance of collective consciousness and social solidarity. However, he was critical of Rousseau's views. Another thinker, who had

an influence on Durkheim, was Henri de Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon believed that modern industrial society needs scientific knowledge and social planning to maintain order. This helped Durkheim to investigate the conditions of social integration.

Apart from these intellectual influences, several historical trends and events contributed to the development of Durkheim's ideas. First, the French revolution weakened the influence of religion and political traditions, second, the Industrial revolution changed economic life through industrialization, urbanization and development of the division of labour. These fast-changing processes raised the question of unity of societies under conditions of increasing complexity and individualism.

All these intellectual and historical influences helped to create a scientific discipline of sociology devoted to the explanation of the forces that maintain social order, social integration and moral regulation of society.

3.1.5 Durkheim's Contribution to Sociology

Durkheim made several significant contributions to the development of sociology. First, he claimed that society is the reality itself and has its own characteristics which cannot be reduced to individual actions. Institutions, customs, laws and moral values of society exist independently of individuals and influence them.

Second, Durkheim introduced the concept of social facts and claimed that sociology should study external social reality in a scientific way. Third, he recommended to use objective and empirical methods in sociological research. He believed that the social phenomena should be observed, classified, compared and analyzed according to the systematic procedures typical for natural sciences.

Fourth, Durkheim explained how societies maintain social solidarity through shared beliefs, values and institutions. His study of the division of labour shows how modern societies achieve social cohesion in spite of their increasing specialization.

Fifth, Durkheim proved that even personal actions, such as suicide, can be influenced by social factors. This helped to establish sociology as the discipline capable to explain different aspects of human behavior.

3.1.6 Major Works

The major works of Durkheim are:

- The Division of Labour in Society (1893) that describes the development of social solidarity from traditional to modern societies.
- The Rules of Sociological Method (1895) that lays down the foundations of scientific sociology and introduces the notion of social facts.
- Suicide (1897) that offers the first systematic sociological study of suicide applying statistics.
- The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912) that studies religion as a social institution that reinforces collective existence.

The above works established the foundations of modern sociology.

3.1.7 Let Us Sum Up

Émile Durkheim was one of the leading founding fathers of sociology as a scientific discipline. Using his objective research, social facts and empirical methods, Durkheim showed that society is real beyond individuals. His contribution changed sociology from a speculative science to a scientific one. Émile Durkheim's works on the division of labour, sociological method, religion, and suicide continue to have great significance for current sociological research. His ideas are still important for understanding social order, social integration, morality and functioning of modern societies.

3.1.8 Keywords

Social Facts, Scientific Sociology, Social Solidarity, Collective Consciousness, Division of Labour, Sociological Method, Religion, Suicide.

3.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Sketch the life and academic background of Émile Durkheim.
2. What makes Émile Durkheim one of the founders of sociology?
3. Discuss the major contributions of Émile Durkheim to sociological theories.
4. Enlist the important works by Émile Durkheim and outline their themes.
5. Describe how Émile Durkheim contributed to the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline.

Lesson 3.2 - Division of Labour

Structure

- 3.2.1 Objectives
- 3.2.2 Introduction
- 3.2.3 Concept of Division of Labour
- 3.2.4 Causes of the Division of Labour
- 3.2.5 Functions of Division of Labour
- 3.2.6 Mechanical Solidarity
- 3.2.7 Organic Solidarity
- 3.2.8 Difference between Mechanical and Organic Solidarity
- 3.2.9 Abnormal Forms of the Division of Labour
- 3.2.10 Evaluation of Durkheim's Theory
- 3.2.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.2.12 Keywords
- 3.2.13 Self-Assessment Questions

3.2.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- Bring out the concept of division of labour;
- distinguish mechanical and organic solidarity;
- examine the causes and consequences of the division of labour; and
- criticize Durkheim's theory.

3.2.2 Introduction

The notion of the division of labour plays a pivotal role in Émile Durkheim's sociological theory. Presented in his book *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), this theory explains how societies maintain unity and social order with growing specialization of work. Economists viewed the division of labour mainly as an instrument of increased efficiency and productivity, whereas Durkheim saw it as a social phenomenon that transforms social relations and increases social integration.

According to Durkheim, transition from primitive traditional societies to complex industrial societies leads to considerable changes in

the mode of people's living and interaction. With increasing specialization of occupations, people increasingly become dependent on each other in terms of goods, services and social support. Thus, the division of labour does not only increase the efficiency but also creates new types of social solidarity needed for maintaining social cohesion.

3.2.3 Concept of Division of Labour

division of labour refers to the distribution of various occupations and tasks between individuals and groups in a society. Instead of performing all the activities themselves, people specialize in certain occupations due to their skills, knowledge and experience. This specialization not only increases efficiency but also creates interdependence of the members of society.

According to Durkheim, the division of labour should be understood not only as an economic arrangement but also as a social institution which influences social relations, moral values and cooperation. With growing size and complexity of societies, the division of labour increases and requires more coordination and mutual dependency of individuals.

The primary function of division of labour for Durkheim is to increase social solidarity or unity and integration of society. It provides the moral base for cooperation by forcing people to realize their dependency on each other. Hence, social cohesion of modern societies arises not due to similarity but to functional interdependence.

division of labour also facilitates social organization through the distribution of responsibilities among the occupations and institutions. Teachers, doctors, engineers, farmers, lawyers and administrators perform various specialized functions which guarantee the normal functioning of society. Therefore, the stability of modern society depends on cooperation of these different occupational groups.

According to Durkheim, increasing specialization is the natural evolution of society. With the growth of population and social interactions, society develops more differentiated structures which require people to perform increasingly specialized functions. This process marks the transition from traditional modes of social organization to the industrial society.

Division of Labour: Durkheim Vs. Adam Smith

Both Adam Smith and Émile Durkheim discussed the division of labour, but from different perspectives. Adam Smith studied the division

of labour mostly as an economic principle which increases efficiency, productivity and wealth by specializing workers in particular tasks.

Durkheim, in turn, perceived the division of labour as a social phenomenon. In his opinion, its main importance consists not in increasing efficiency but in creating social solidarity. As people specialize, they increasingly become dependent on each other in terms of goods, services and knowledge. This dependency creates new types of social cohesion without which the effective functioning of modern societies would be impossible. Thus, Adam Smith emphasized the economic aspects of specialization, while Durkheim paid attention to its social and moral aspects.

3.2.4 Causes of the Division of Labour

According to Durkheim, economic efficiency does not explain the growth of the division of labour. He identified several social causes of its development.

Increasing Population: The growth of population increases competition for existing occupations and resources. As more people live together, it becomes impossible for everybody to do the same activities. Specialization appears as a means which allows accommodating increasing population.

Dynamic Density: Durkheim considered dynamic density as the main cause of the division of labour. Dynamic density implies the combination of population growth, increased social interaction and improved communications. Increasing social contacts stimulate competition and specialization.

However, he differentiated between two types of density, physical and dynamic (or moral) density. Physical density means an increase in the individuals who live in one geographical area; whereas dynamic density implies the increase in the level of social interaction, communication and exchange. Better transportation, communication and economic activities make people more dependent on one another and at the same time intensify cooperation and competition. With an increase in social contacts the division of labour becomes more intensive.

Urbanization: Growth of urban centres brings together people of diverse backgrounds and occupations. Cities offer favourable conditions for emergence of special branches of industry, profession and service, hence the emergence of the more complex division of labour.

Industrialization: Industrialization brings about emergence of new technologies, occupations and production systems which require certain special skills and knowledge. Factories, transport systems, banks, administration etc. cannot exist without highly differentiated labor force.

Advance of Science and Technology: Progress in science and technology creates constantly new spheres of specialisation. The modern society needs specialists in medicine, engineering, information technology, education, finances and many other professions.

Increased social needs: Social development leads to the appearance of different needs of individuals. Their satisfaction requires specialists in corresponding occupations and services.

Thus Durkheim pointed out that all these factors contribute to the functional differentiation and specialization become inevitable for the modern society.

3.2.5 Functions of Division of Labour

Division of labour according to Durkheim fulfils a function in the social life. Firstly, it reinforces social solidarity by bringing about mutual dependence of individuals. Since everyone needs other people's services, cooperation is necessary for survival of everyone in society.

Secondly, specialization raises efficiency of work and allows workers to improve their professional skills. Thirdly, division of labour organizes society by distributing roles among institutions and professions. Fourthly, specialization stimulates innovations and the development of techniques. Finally, division of labour increases social stability by integrating various occupations into system of cooperation.

3.2.6 Mechanical Solidarity

Mechanical solidarity is a type of social solidarity typical for simple and traditional societies. The term "mechanical" was not intended by Durkheim to refer to any machinery or technology. On the contrary, Durkheim meant that social solidarity arises spontaneously due to the similarity of individuals in their beliefs, values, occupations and lifestyle. Members of such societies have similar tasks, experiences and morals.

In societies with mechanical solidarity the collective conscience is strong and controls individual behavior. The collective conscience is the set of beliefs, values, customs and morality recognized by all members of society. Individuals see themselves not as independent personalities but as

part of the community. Since most people are similar in their lifestyle and occupations there is no need for any specialization.

Rural and tribal societies are the example of mechanical solidarity. Their economic activity usually includes agriculture, hunting, fishing or some craft. Family, religion, education, traditions are closely connected and everyone must comply with existing social norms. Control in such societies is exercised via customs, traditions and religion.

One of the distinctive features of mechanical solidarity is that the majority of laws is repressive. Repressive law punishes people for violation of collective values and norms. The task of punishment is not only to correct wrongdoer but to reinforce the authority of collective conscience and preserve the unity of society. Criminal acts are considered crimes against whole society and not against its particular member.

Mechanical solidarity creates stability and social solidarity in societies with low specialization. However, as societies grow and become more complex mechanical solidarity loses its significance because of increased specialization of individuals.

Characteristics of Mechanical Solidarity

- Prevalent in simple and traditional societies.
- Strong collective conscience.
- Similar occupations and social roles of individuals.
- Low level of specialization.
- High level of social conformity.
- Social control through customs, religion and traditions.
- Repressive legal system.
- Collective dominates individual.

3.2.7 Organic Solidarity

Organic solidarity is a type of social solidarity in industrial society. Unlike mechanical solidarity, social unity here arises not because of similarity but because of interdependence brought about by the division of labour. As occupations become more specialized people depend on one another to meet their needs.

Durkheim referred to “organic” by analogy with the organism in which different organs perform certain functions and cooperate with each other. Thus different occupations and institutions also perform certain roles and

contribute to the functioning of society as a whole. Every part of society performs its own unique role but they all are interconnected and mutually dependent.

Modern societies are characterized by a high level of occupational specialization. Doctors provide healthcare services, teachers educate children, engineers design infrastructure, farmers produce food, lawyers administer justice, lawyers defend rights of people and many other specialists perform certain functions. None of these occupations can exist without others and this is why cooperation is inevitable for the social stability.

In societies with organic solidarity the collective conscience remains significant but becomes less important than in traditional societies. People enjoy their personal freedom, individuality and have their own identity, occupations and lifestyles. Diversity is accepted and social solidarity is ensured by cooperation and not by similarity.

Legal system in such societies is mostly restitutive rather than repressive. Restitutive law aims to restore normal social relations after a conflict through compensation of damage or enforcing of contractual obligations rather than punishing wrongdoers. Examples of restitutive laws are civil law, commercial law, labor law and administrative law. Organic solidarity allows to combine diversity with stability due to mutual dependence.

Features of Organic Solidarity

- Present in modern industrial societies.
- High division of labour.
- High specialization of occupation.
- Freedom of individuals.
- Social integration through interdependence.
- Collective conscience comparatively weak but diverse.
- Restitutive law system.
- Complex social and economic institutions.

3.2.8 Difference between Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

According to Durkheim, mechanical and organic solidarity were different forms of social integration representing different stages of social development (Table 3.2.1). Thus, the shift from mechanical to organic solidarity was considered by Durkheim as one of the key processes in

social evolution. Instead of weakening the social solidarity, the increasing specialization leads to the emergence of new forms of cooperation making possible efficient functioning of complicated societies. However, this shift brings some new problems that include, for example, the problem of weakened moral regulation and social disorganization studied by Durkheim in the context of abnormal forms of the division of labour.

Table 3.2.1 Comparison between Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

Criterion	Mechanical Solidarity	Organic Solidarity
Type of society	Traditional and simple	Modern and industrial
Basis of unity	Similarity among individuals	Interdependence among individuals
Division of labour	Minimal	Highly developed
Collective conscience	Very strong	Comparatively weaker
Individual freedom	Limited	Greater
Social relationships	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
Legal system	Repressive law	Restitutive law
Occupational specialization	Low	High
Social control	Customs, religion and traditions	Laws, contracts and institutions

3.2.9 Abnormal Forms of the Division of Labour

According to Durkheim, normally the division of labour strengthens the social solidarity by promoting cooperation and interdependence. However, there are some cases when the division of labour does not carry out this integrative function. The specialization fails to bring social harmony and there appear some disorganization of occupational relations that makes the division of labour abnormal or pathological. Thus, such situations lead to reduction of social cohesion and to the emergence of conflicts, inequality and instability.

According to Durkheim, there are three main abnormal forms of the division of labour.

1. Anomic Division of Labour

Anomie is the lack of control by rules or the state of loosening of norms. In the course of industrialization, during the economic crisis or any other period of social change, the established rules of occupational and economic activity may become ineffective. Thus, people are left without any clear moral direction regarding their roles, rights and obligations.

Under such circumstances, there appears excessive competition, the decrease of cooperation and conflicts among the occupational groups. People are dissatisfied because social rules do not correspond to the changing economic situation. As a result, this state of confusion may cause different social problems including crime, labour unrest and even suicides.

2. Forced Division of Labour

The division of labour becomes abnormal when the occupation is given on the basis of birth, inheritance, caste, class, wealth or political influences rather than on the basis of personal ability and merit. Such kind of division of labour was named by Durkheim as forced.

Under such conditions, people are deprived of an opportunity to engage in occupations corresponding to their talents and abilities. Social inequalities do not allow a fair allocation of occupational positions causing frustration, discontent and conflicts. Durkheim stated that a normal division of labour required the equality of opportunity enabling individuals to take appropriate positions on the basis of competence.

3. Poorly Coordinated Division of Labour

This is another abnormal form when specialized occupations are poorly coordinated with one another. Thus, although each individual performs certain functions, the lack of cooperation decreases the efficiency of the whole system. Such poor coordination may cause the duplication of work, inefficiency of administration, inefficiency of institutions and conflicts among different professional groups. Without regulation and co-ordination, the specialization does not strengthen social solidarity.

Importance of Abnormal Forms of division of labour

It should be emphasized that abnormal forms of division of labour are not inevitable results of modernization. They occur only in case of the failure of institutions in regulating relationships among individuals and occupational groups. Thus, a proper moral regulation, equality of

opportunity and coordination are the key elements of the positive influence of the division of labour on social solidarity.

3.2.10 Evaluation of Durkheim's Theory

Thus, the theory of the division of labour is still considered as one of the most significant explanations of social integration in the modern sociology. At the same time, it has met several criticisms of the later sociologists.

Relevance

This theory made the following contributions to sociological knowledge. First of all, it shifted attention from economic aspects of specialization to its social and moral significance. Durkheim showed that the division of labour creates interdependence among individuals thus strengthening social solidarity.

Secondly, the theory explains the maintenance of social order in modern societies despite increasing diversity. Instead of similarity, social cohesion in modern societies is provided by cooperation of specialized occupations. Thirdly, the theory introduces the concepts of mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity which still remains valuable analytical tools.

Fourthly, the analysis of abnormal forms drew attention to the importance of moral regulation and social institutions in providing social stability. The concept of anomie became one of the most popular concepts in sociology. Finally, the theory served as the basis for further functionalist theories developed by sociologists like Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton.

Criticism

However, the theory had been criticized on the following points. Firstly, Durkheim paid too much attention to social consensus ignoring conflicts and power inequalities. Marxist sociologists claim that the division of labour shows the economic exploitation and class domination rather than cooperation. Secondly, Durkheim saw the social evolution as a process of a gradual transition from the traditional to the modern society which was not true in real history. Moreover, it has been criticized for its too rigid distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity which was not always the case in real societies.

Durkheim has been criticized for understating the role of individual choice and agency. His overemphasis on social structures leaves little space for explanation of individual creativity and resistance. Finally, the theory has been criticized for its assumption about the natural promotion of harmony through specialization. In modern societies, there is increasing inequality, stress, occupational strain and organizational conflicts. Although the criticisms have altered Durkheim's perception, his theory still remains a powerful instrument for understanding social cohesion and social transformation.

3.2.11 Let Us Sum Up

Durkheim regarded the division of labour as a social institution that promotes solidarity rather than merely increasing economic productivity. As societies develop, occupational specialization creates interdependence among individuals, leading to a transition from mechanical solidarity, based on similarity, to organic solidarity, based on functional dependence. This transformation enables modern societies to maintain social cohesion despite increasing diversity and complexity.

Durkheim also recognized that the division of labour may assume abnormal forms, such as anomic, forced, and poorly coordinated division of labour, when moral regulation and social institutions fail to function effectively. Despite certain criticisms, his theory remains a landmark contribution to sociology because it explains how social order is maintained in both traditional and modern societies.

3.2.12 Keywords

Division of Labour, Mechanical Solidarity, Organic Solidarity, Collective Conscience, Dynamic Density, Repressive Law, Restitutive Law

3.2.13 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Bring out the Durkheimian concept of the division of labour.
2. Explain the factors responsible for the growth of the division of labour.
3. Distinguish between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity.
4. Describe the abnormal forms of the division of labour identified by Durkheim.
5. Critically evaluate the significance and limitations of Durkheim's theory of the division of labour.

Lesson 3.3 - Rules of Sociological Method

Structure

- 3.3.1 Objectives
- 3.3.2 Introduction
- 3.3.3 Sociology as a Scientific Discipline
- 3.3.4 Social Facts
- 3.3.5 Rules of Sociological Method
- 3.3.6 Normal and Pathological Social Facts
- 3.3.7 Objectivity in Sociological Research
- 3.3.8 Evaluation of Durkheim's Methodology
- 3.3.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.3.10 Keywords
- 3.3.11 Self-Assessment Questions

3.3.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, learners will be able to:

- explain Durkheim's scientific approach to sociology;
- describe the concept and characteristics of social facts;
- discuss the methodological rules proposed by Durkheim for the scientific study of society;
- distinguish between normal and pathological social facts; and
- critically evaluate the significance and limitations of Durkheim's methodological principles.

3.3.2 Introduction

One of the most important contributions to sociology made by Émile Durkheim was his development of scientific methodology in the study of society. In his important work, 'The Rules of Sociological Method' (1895), Durkheim aimed at making sociology an independent science having its own subject matter and methods of investigations. Being developed at the time when the study of society was dominated by philosophy, theology and speculations, this book attempted to argue that the social phenomena had to be observed and studied objectively, empirically and logically.

Durkheim held that society has a reality of its own that cannot be reduced to individual ideas, feelings or actions. Social institutions, customs, laws, values and beliefs exist independently of the individual and affect his behaviour. Therefore, sociology has to deal with the study of objective social reality called social facts. Sociology has to be free of subjective prejudices in its study of social facts and has to explain these facts through other social conditions and not through individual psychology.

‘The Rules of Sociological Method’ is the foundation of methodological principles of modern sociology. This work introduces important principles concerning the observation, explanation and classification of social phenomena and emphasizes the importance of objectivity, comparative and empirical analyses of social life. Most of these principles remain an important element of sociological investigation until today.

3.3.3 Sociology as a Scientific Discipline

According to Durkheim, sociology is an independent science having its own subject matter and methodology. According to Durkheim, each science studies a certain aspect of reality using the methods of science. Biology deals with living organisms, economics with economic activities, psychology with individual mental phenomena and sociology with social facts. Therefore, sociology has to be independent of philosophy, theology and psychology in the explanations of social phenomena.

In the nineteenth century many of the explanations of society were based on philosophical and moral speculation. Durkheim challenged the prevailing tradition by claiming that social phenomena are objective realities and can be studied scientifically. Like natural scientists observe and experiment physical phenomena, sociologists have to study social phenomena using certain scientific methods based on the empirical data.

According to Durkheim, the main aim of sociology is to find the laws that govern social life. Scientific knowledge does not depend upon individual preferences, religious beliefs and political opinions. Instead, the sociologists have to collect the reliable information, to classify the observations systematically, to make comparisons between different social situations and to find out the causes and functions of social phenomena.

Durkheim also emphasized that sociology is fundamentally different from psychology. Psychology tries to explain individual behaviour using

individual mental phenomena, whereas sociology studies the social conditions affecting the behaviour of people. Changes in family structure, education, crime or religious practices cannot be explained only by observing individual motives. They have to be explained analyzing the wider social institutions and cultural values.

This idea of the objective study of society transformed sociology into a scientific discipline able to explain social order, social change and social integration. Methodology of Durkheim encouraged the use of statistics, comparison and empirical observations and later became the standard methods of sociological research.

3.3.4 Social Facts

The concept of social facts forms the methodological basis of Durkheim's approach. According to Durkheim, sociology has to concentrate its attention upon the study of social facts being the objective reality of society.

Durkheim defined social facts as ways of acting, thinking and feeling that exist outside the individual and that have a coercive influence upon the individual. Unlike personal opinions and preferences of individuals, social facts are created by society as a whole and exist independently of any individual. An individual faces these facts from the moment of birth and acquires them gradually in the course of socialization.

For example, language, law, educational institutions, religion, customs, moral values, marriage practices, money and system of government are created long before the birth of an individual. They exist even after the death of an individual. The individuals usually submit to these rules because they are considered to be legitimate by society and deviance from them leads to criticism, punishment or rejection.

Durkheim claimed that even if an individual obeys or violates the social rules, he cannot avoid the influence of the social facts. If the individual ignores the rules of law he will face legal sanctions, if he violates social custom — ridicules or exclusion and if he ignores the rules of morality — loses social approval. Thus, social facts have the coercive force that is independent of individual freedom of choice.

Since the social facts affect behaviour systematically, Durkheim considers them to be the proper subject matter of sociology. Their objective character allows the sociologists to study them scientifically using the methods of observation, comparison and empirical analyses.

Characteristics of Social Facts

Durkheim found several features distinguishing social facts from individual ideas or psychological phenomena.

Externality: Social facts exist outside the individual. They are created by society collectively and not personally by individuals. Such institutions as the family, education, religion, law and government are inherited from the previous generations and affect subsequent generations.

Coerciveness: Social facts have the coercive influence upon the individual. Society expects its members to obey established norms and values. This influence can be performed through legal and institutional means like laws and courts or through informal means like customs, traditions, public opinion, praises and criticism.

Generality: Social facts are common for the majority of the members of society. They are patterns of collective behaviour and thought and not the isolated personal habits.

Collective Origin: Social facts arise as a result of collective interaction among the members of society. They develop gradually as a result of collective experiences, traditions, institutions and historical development and not as the result of individual decisions.

Objective Reality: Social facts have the objective reality independent of individual consciousness. Since they can be observed through institutions, laws, customs, demographical statistics and patterns of behaviour they can be studied scientifically.

Types of Social Facts

Durkheim distinguished the two types of social facts – material and non-material social facts.

Material Social Facts: Material social facts are visible and organized structures of society. They are institutions and organizations that can be observed directly.

Examples include:

- Legal systems
- Educational institutions
- Government and political organizations
- Religious institutions

- Family structure
- Economic organizations

These institutions control social behaviour and maintain social order.

Non-Material Social Facts: Non-material social facts are collective ideas, beliefs, values and norms regulating individual behavior. Non-material social facts, though cannot be observed physically, influence our social life anyway.

They include such examples as:

- Collective conscience;
- Moral values;
- Social norms;
- Religious beliefs;
- Public opinion;
- Customs and traditions.

Durkheim found non-material social facts especially important as they constitute the moral foundation of society and regulate relationships between individuals.

3.3.5 Rules of Sociological Method

The primary goal of The Rules of Sociological Method was the establishment of principles for scientific investigation of society. According to Durkheim, sociology cannot be a real science until sociologists observe systematic and objective procedures during investigation of social phenomena. In order to fulfill this aim, he offered some methodological rules that still play an important role in sociological investigation.

All these rules are supposed to assure that social investigation is free of any personal prejudices and grounded on the empirical data rather than on speculations and common sense. Taken together, these rules provide a scientific basis for the observation, analysis and explanation of social facts.

Treat Social Facts as Things

The most famous methodological rule proposed by Durkheim is that social facts must be treated as things. Though with the word “thing” Durkheim did not mean physical objects, he meant that social facts have to be regarded as objective realities existing regardless of the observer. Just like the objects of the natural world, social facts have observable properties that can be observed, described and analyzed scientifically.

As Durkheim states, sociologists have to start their investigation without any hypotheses about how the society should be. They have to investigate social facts just as they are. Such social institutions as marriage, religion, education, crime, law, customs and political institutions have to be investigated objectively via observation and empirical evidence rather than through moral judgment or personal opinion.

Treatment of social facts as things implies that researchers have to maintain scientific objectivity. The task of sociology is not to judge social institutions positively or negatively but to understand how they operate, why they exist and what influence they exert. This principle differs sociology from philosophy, theology and political ideology.

Eliminate Preconceived Ideas

According to Durkheim, sociologists have to get rid of preconceived ideas before beginning scientific investigation. Everyday life often makes us form opinions about society basing on personal experience, cultural tradition, religious belief or political ideology. These opinions may affect our ordinary perception but they cannot affect scientific conclusions.

Researchers have to forget their personal assumptions and start investigation of every social phenomenon with an open mind. Investigation in science requires empirical evidence rather than intuition and common sense. Sociologists have to prove each conclusion basing on systematic observation and analysis.

For example, the public opinion may explain crime just by moral weakness of individual. However, Durkheim argues that sociologists have to investigate such aspects of social life as poverty, unemployment, education, urbanization or social disorganization before forming any scientific explanations. Thus, elimination of preconceived ideas enables sociology to produce objective knowledge free of any personal biases.

Define the Subject Precisely

Another methodological rule suggested by Durkheim is that the subject of investigation should be precisely defined before the beginning of research. Vague concepts often lead to inconsistent observations and untrustworthy conclusions. Thus, sociologists have to define their subjects according to their observable characteristics.

Precise definition allows researchers to understand exactly what they study, find relevant evidence and maintain consistency during all process

of investigation. Besides, precise definitions facilitate comparison of various studies and increase reliability of scientific results.

Durkheim himself precisely defined concepts like social facts, crime, religion and suicide before their analysis. For example, his precise definition of suicide allowed him to distinguish suicide from other kinds of death and compare the rates of suicide in different societies using common criteria. Thus, precise definitions of conceptual terms are a crucial requirement for scientific sociological research.

Observe Social Facts Objectively

According to Durkheim, objective observation is the base of scientific sociology. Researchers have to collect evidence systematically and analyze it without any influence of personal beliefs, emotions and values.

Objective observation consists in collection of reliable evidence from appropriate sources such as official records, census reports, legal documents, institutional records, historical documents and statistical data. Researchers have to categorize their observations, make comparison of various cases and detect regularities before forming conclusions.

Durkheim rejected those explanations that were based just on personal impression or isolated cases. Scientific conclusions have to be formed after thorough examination of sufficient empirical evidence. Thus, his emphasis on objectivity greatly increased credibility of sociological research and distinguished sociology from speculative philosophy.

Explain Social Facts by Other Social Facts

One of the most important methodological rules proposed by Durkheim is that social facts should be explained by other social facts. He strongly opposed the attempt to explain social phenomena by means of individual psychology or biological factors.

According to Durkheim, every social fact emerges under the influence of broader social conditions. Therefore, it has to be explained within the limits of society. Social institutions, norms, values, laws, economic system and social organization represent the appropriate context for understanding of social behavior.

For example, differences in crime rates cannot be explained just by taking into account individual personalities. Instead, sociologists have to investigate such aspects of social life as inequality, unemployment, family structure, education, community organization and legal system. Similarly,

differences in achievements in education, religious activity or family stability have to be explained by means of analysis of appropriate social institutions and social culture.

Thus, this rule reinforced the argument of Durkheim about unique subject matter of sociology distinct from psychology and biology. Social reality has to be explained socially.

Distinguish Cause from Function

Durkheim stresses that sociologists have to distinguish the cause of social fact from its function. Though both are required for scientific explanation, they answer different questions. Cause of social fact is the social conditions causing emergence or development of the fact. To explain the cause of a phenomenon, researchers have to establish historical and social circumstances producing it.

Function, however, is the contribution performed by social fact to maintaining and stability of society. Social institution may exist due to the performance of useful functions even though the circumstances producing it have already changed.

For example, the education system could have arisen under certain historical circumstances. Nevertheless, the current roles of this institution include transferring knowledge, fostering socialization, developing skills and preparing people for work roles. Historical causes of the emergence of education are different from the functions performed by it in contemporary society.

Thus, confusion between causes and functions creates incomplete sociological explanations. Therefore, scientific investigations should involve an analysis of the causes of the emergence of a social phenomenon and its functions in the social system as a whole.

Using the Comparative Method

Comparative approach was considered by Durkheim as one of the most important research techniques in sociology. As controlled laboratory experiments are rarely carried out in sociological studies, comparison can serve as an effective substitute to identify causes. The comparative approach includes an examination of similar and different features of societies, institutions, periods in history, or social groups. Comparing several cases, sociologists can identify what social factors are connected with certain

social phenomena and distinguish between general phenomena and occasional cases.

In his investigation of suicide Durkheim used a comparative approach comparing suicide rates in different countries, religions, families and occupational categories. Such a comparative analysis allowed him to prove that variations in suicide rates are related to social integration and social regulation and not to psychological factors.

Similarly, sociologists can use the comparative approach comparing educational systems, family systems, legal systems, religious participation etc. across different societies to discover the social causes of certain differences. Comparison can make significant contribution to the development of general sociological explanations based on the empirical data.

3.3.6 Normal and Pathological Social Facts

Having determined the methodological rules of sociological research, Durkheim moved on to consider an important question: how sociologists can differentiate whether certain social phenomena have a normal or abnormal nature? In order to solve this problem, he introduced the distinction between normal and pathological social facts. It allowed sociologists to evaluate social phenomena scientifically rather than subjectively using their moral standards.

According to Durkheim, sociologists should not call a certain social fact “good” or “bad” depending on their opinion about its nature. Instead, sociologists need to establish whether this phenomenon is common to a certain kind of society and contributes to maintaining its normal functioning. Thus, the distinction between normal and pathological social facts is based on scientific observations rather than subjective evaluations.

Normal Social Facts

A normal social fact is a phenomenon that exists broadly in a certain kind of society and contributes to its normal functioning. Such facts are called natural because they perform necessary social functions under normal conditions. Existence of normal facts is determined by the normal functioning of social institutions and relations.

It is important to remember that sociologists should understand normality of a social fact as normality for a certain stage of the development of society. A fact that is normal in a modern industrial society is not

necessary normal in a traditional society and vice versa. Thus, sociologists should consider normality in connection with certain social context.

Institutions such as the family, education, religion, law and occupational specialization are normal social facts since they contribute to social integration, regulation and continuity. These institutions perform necessary functions helping to maintain normal social order.

One of the most original propositions made by Durkheim concerns the status of crime in society. While many people tend to believe that crime is completely abnormal, Durkheim suggests that there is certain normal level of crime in each society. Since it is impossible to achieve full conformity to social norms, certain deviations are always inevitable. Presence of crime proves that society is open enough for individual variations.

Furthermore, Durkheim claims that crime itself may have certain positive social functions. Public reaction to crime contributes to the strengthening of collective moral sentiments by reaffirming values and social norms. Sometimes deviant acts recognized as criminal may help to advance society and overcome old traditions or unjust social rules. Therefore, crime should not necessarily be considered as pathological fact just because it violates certain laws.

Pathological Social Facts

Pathological social fact is a phenomenon that interferes with the normal functioning of society and decreases its social integration or regulation. Such facts show that society experiences certain kind of disorder or dysfunction and needs certain measures to be taken to correct it.

Pathological conditions arise when social institutions do not perform their functions properly or when social relations become seriously disordered. They are usually generated during the times of rapid social changes, economic crises, political instability or destruction of institutions.

Examples of pathological social facts include very high crime rate, corruption, chronic unemployment, social inequality, destruction of institutions and constant social conflicts. Durkheim considers the state of anomie or the weakening of moral regulation as one of the most serious pathological conditions occurring in modern industrial societies.

Unlike normal social facts, pathological facts interfere with stability and cohesion of society. They decrease the ability of institutions to regulate behavior and weaken the influence of collective moral values.

Distinguishing Between Normal and Pathological Facts

It is important to stress that sociologists should make a careful distinction between two types of social facts based on empirical evidence rather than on their subjective preferences. The distinction depends on three main criteria. First of all, the sociologist should investigate the phenomenon in relation to the kind of society in which it arises. Certain social fact may be normal in one kind of society and pathological in another. Secondly, the sociologist should find out whether the phenomenon is common in societies of the same kind. Wide spread often indicates that the phenomenon plays certain role in the normal functioning of that society.

Third, the functions accomplished by the phenomenon need to be examined. If they are useful in maintaining social integration and order, then the phenomenon can be considered normal. In case these functions weaken the social life of a society, it should be considered pathological.

3.3.7 Objective Approach in Sociological Research

The notion of objectivity has paramount importance in Durkheim's methodological system. According to him, sociological research could turn into science only when scientists studied society objectively, without any personal beliefs, emotions, or political views interfering with research results.

In Durkheim's view, sociologists are people living in the same society they are researching. Thus, the researcher himself is influenced by customs, tradition, religion, ideology, and other elements of life. If these personal influences affect sociological research, then the results will become subjective and unreliable. In order to avoid this situation, according to Durkheim, sociologists have to study societies objectively, to gather evidence systematically, to define concepts precisely, to confirm results with observations, and to be ready to change their interpretation whenever new evidence appears.

Also, objectivity in sociological research implies the ability of sociologists to distinguish between facts and values. The main task of sociology consists in explaining why this or that phenomenon exists and what functions it accomplishes. Thus, sociologists do not need to make any moral judgments about social facts. For instance, when investigating crime, divorce, poverty, and suicide, sociologists have to study the reasons of these phenomena and their social consequences, but not their moral value.

The demand of objectivity in sociology encourages the intensive usage of statistics, official information, historical data, and comparative method in sociological research. These ways reduce the possibility of personal bias in scientific investigation and increase the validity of its results. Though the complete objectivity is impossible in practice, Durkheim thought that it was a necessary scientific ideal. And his insistence on objective investigation still affects current sociological research especially in quantitative studies based on empirical data.

3.3.8 Evaluation of Durkheim's Methodology

Durkheim's methodological principles brought about the independence of sociology as a science and greatly affected sociological research all around the world. On the other hand, some problems with this methodology were pointed out by the sociologists who came after Durkheim.

Contributions

The main contribution of Durkheim consists in his recognition of sociology as an independent science which possesses specific subject matter and research methods. By finding the proper object of sociological research in social facts, he distinguished sociology from psychology, philosophy, and theology. His insistence upon objectivity, empiricism, and systematic investigation made sociological research more credible. Scientists were encouraged to base their conclusions on the results of observation, not upon personal opinions or speculations. He emphasized also the importance of concept clarity. Precise definitions of concepts before investigation increased the validity of sociological research and this principle still belongs to the fundamentals of social sciences.

Also, the advocacy of Durkheim to the comparative method gave sociologists a practical alternative to laboratory experiment. With the help of comparing of societies, social institutions, and epochs, sociologists are able to find causal relationships and construct general explanation of social phenomena.

Another enduring contribution of Durkheim is his distinction between cause and function. This distinction became one of the main principles of structural functionalism and greatly influenced such sociologists as Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Finally, he showed that any social behavior can be explained scientifically, even if it is highly personal, with the help of studying of social structures and institutions.

Criticisms

Despite the importance of his methodology, Durkheim's approach to social research had also some critics. First of all, the interpretive sociologists, including Max Weber, criticized him for his excessive concentration on objective social structures, while the subjective meanings of the actions of individuals did not get sufficient attention. They suggested that understanding of human behavior requires the study of motives, intentions, and subjective experience of people in addition to the study of social facts.

Another criticism is connected with Durkheim's treatment of social facts as objective "things." Some critics claim that social life is sometimes more complicated than physical reality because people's actions are sometimes influenced by their emotions, beliefs, values, and subjective interpretations which are hardly measurable.

Also, the conflict theorists criticized Durkheim for his excessive attention to social order, consensus, and stability while the questions of inequality, domination, conflicts, and power relations in society got little attention. They claimed that many social institutions are favorable to some groups of people and harmful to others.

And, finally, some scientists suppose that complete objectivity is hard to reach because the researcher himself is a member of society and possesses some cultural values and subjective experience which may affect his interpretations. Despite all these criticisms, the principles of Durkheim's methodology remain one of the most important contributions to sociological theory. His scientific approach still forms the basis of many empirical sociological investigations.

3.3.9 Let Us Sum Up

With the help of his book "The Rules of Sociological Method," Émile Durkheim made sociology a scientific discipline recognizing social facts as its proper object of research. Social facts are the external, collective and coercive realities which affect human behavior and have to be investigated objectively with the help of observations, comparisons, and empirical research.

The main principles of Durkheim's methodology, including treatment of social facts as things, elimination of preconceptions, definition of concepts precisely, distinction between causes and functions, and comparative method, gave sociology the scientific framework. He

also differentiated between normal and pathological social facts and emphasized that sociologists have to evaluate social phenomena depending on their influence on functioning of societies, and not on the basis of moral considerations. Despite the criticism of Durkheim's methodology concerning its insufficient attention to meanings of actions, it remains one of the most important bases of modern sociological research.

3.3.10 Keywords

Social Facts, Sociological Method, Scientific Sociology, Objectivity, Externality, Coerciveness, Collective Conscience

3.3.11 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain Durkheim's concept of social facts. Why did he consider social facts the proper subject matter of sociology?
2. Discuss the major characteristics of social facts with suitable examples.
3. Explain the methodological rules proposed by Durkheim for the scientific study of society.
4. Distinguish between the **cause** and **function** of a social fact according to Durkheim.
5. Differentiate between normal and pathological social facts. Why did Durkheim consider crime to be a normal social fact?

Lesson 3.4 - Religion and Society

Structure

- 3.4.1 Objectives
- 3.4.2 Introduction
- 3.4.3 Durkheim's Concept of Religion
- 3.4.4 Sacred and Profane
- 3.4.5 Totemism
- 3.4.6 Collective Conscience and Collective Effervescence
- 3.4.7 Functions of Religion
- 3.4.8 Criticisms and Contemporary Relevance
- 3.4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.4.10 Keywords
- 3.4.11 Self-Assessment Questions

3.4.1 Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe Durkheim's sociological perspective on religion;
- Differentiate the concepts of the sacred and the profane;
- Explain the theory of totemism by Durkheim;
- Analyze the social functions of religion; and
- Evaluate the contributions and criticisms of the theory of religion developed by Durkheim.

3.4.2 Introduction

Religion is one of the most influential institutions in the history of humanity. Even though many scholars examined the subject from theological and philosophical perspectives, Émile Durkheim analyzed religion as a social institution that helps in the integration and stabilization of society. In his well-known book 'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life' published in 1912, he tried to determine the most basic features of religion and explain why it exists in all known societies.

The French sociologist maintained that religion is a social phenomenon rather than the phenomenon of personal faith. Religious

beliefs, rituals, and symbols express the values of society and contribute to the creation of social solidarity. According to him, when people adore religious symbols, they actually pay tribute to society itself. Sociological interpretation of religion was one of the most influential functionalist theories of religious life.

3.4.3 Durkheim's Concept of Religion

Durkheim defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices connected with sacred things that unite people into the moral community called a Church. This definition means that religion is not only the belief in supernatural beings but also a system of ideas, rituals, and moral values that create cohesion within society.

There are two essential elements in religion according to Durkheim:

- Beliefs, which are ideas and values concerning sacred objects and beings.
- Rituals, which are the forms of behaviour that people perform to express their beliefs.

The feeling of belonging to society is provided due to the fact that religion provides people with common moral principles and experiences. With the help of collective worship, ceremonies, and festivals, individuals establish closer connections to their community and affirm the values.

It is crucial to point out that the main role of religion is performed in terms of its social functions but not in terms of the truth or falsity of its doctrines. No matter what beliefs are peculiar to particular religions, they all promote the maintenance of social unity and collective identity.

3.4.4 Sacred and Profane

The distinction between the sacred and the profane is the basis of Durkheim's theory of religion.

Sacred

sacred things are perceived as special, holy, or worthy of reverence. They are regulated by social rules and separated from daily life of people. The sacred objects inspire respect, devotion, and collective loyalty of members of society. The examples of sacred elements include religious texts, temples, mosques, churches, sacred rivers, national flags, and objects that are used during the religious ceremonies. The sacredness of these objects depends not on their physical qualities but on the collective meanings.

Profane

The term profane refers to ordinary objects, activities, and aspects of daily life that lack any religious significance. Profane activities belong to the routine social life and are not accompanied by special rituals or restrictions. According to Durkheim, every religion distinctly separates the sacred from the profane. This separation is performed with the help of beliefs, rituals, customs, and social norms. Disrespecting sacred rules often leads to social disapproval and even religious sanctions because such actions are viewed as offences to the collective values of society.

The distinction between sacred and profane shows that religion is based on socially provided meanings rather than on the inherent properties of objects.

3.4.5 Totemism

In order to explain the origin of religion, Durkheim turned his attention to the totemism, especially to the practice of this phenomenon among the Australian Aboriginal people. He saw totemism as one of the simplest and oldest types of religion. Totem is the animal, plant, or object that is regarded as the symbolic representation of a clan or social group. People of the clan believe that the totem is special and treat it with high reverence. The totem is the religious symbol and also the symbol of group identity.

According to Durkheim, the totem combines two realities at once:

- The totem symbolizes the sacred power accepted by the community.
- The totem symbolizes the society or clan itself.

When people take part in the collective rituals dedicated to the totem, they reinforce their emotions and loyalty to each other, thus strengthening the unity of the group. So, the totem worship is the way of expressing the loyalty to society. Durkheim concluded that the main source of religion is not the supernatural powers but the collective social life. Religious symbols get their power from the beliefs and feelings of the society.

3.4.6 Collective Conscience and Collective Effervescence

One of the main concepts of Durkheim's sociology is the collective conscience, which is the common beliefs, values, and principles of members of a society. The function of religion is the preservation and transfer of the collective conscience from one generation to another. Also, Durkheim introduced the concept of collective effervescence, which is the term that

describes the emotional energy that appears in the course of collective religious activities. Festivals, ceremonies, pilgrimages, and collective worship cause strong feelings of unity and enthusiasm. Such emotions strengthen group identity and reaffirm the loyalty to common values.

The phenomenon of collective effervescence explains the influence of religious rituals. The emotional excitement caused by the participation in collective activity is renewing the social ties and reinforcing the moral power of the society. Thus, in contrast to religious scholars, Durkheim emphasized the role of religion in the creation and preservation of the collective life.

3.4.7 Functions of Religion

Durkheim regarded religion as one of the main institutions that maintain social order. Religion has several functions that contribute to the stability and continuity of society.

Social Integration: Religion unites people by means of common beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies. The involvement in religious activities helps to strengthen social solidarity and create the feeling of belonging.

Moral Regulation: Religious teachings contain the principles that affect the behavior of individuals. By promoting the qualities like honesty, compassion, discipline, and social responsibility, religion creates the ordered social life.

Preservation of Culture: Religion preserves culture, customs, traditions, values, and beliefs from one generation to another.

Emotional Support: Religion offers psychological support to people during hard times of losses, doubts, illnesses, or other crises. Commonly shared religious beliefs help people to overcome difficulties and stay hopeful.

Social Control: Norms of religion promote compliance with socially acceptable behaviour. With the help of morality and social demands, religion promotes social discipline.

According to Durkheim, these functions can explain the fact that religion exists in practically any society regardless of the beliefs and dogmas.

3.4.8 Criticisms and Contemporary Relevance

Émile Durkheim's sociological theory of religion has become influential but has also raised criticisms.

Criticisms

The first important criticism is the fact that ideas of the theory were based on the study of totemism practiced by indigenous Australian population. According to critics, conclusions made from a relatively simple form of religion cannot be applied to all religions including complex world religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism.

The second criticism is that Durkheim paid more attention to the integrative functions of religion and less to the possible division and conflict provided by religion. In history, religious differences have been the reason for conflicts, violence, and disputes. The supporters of conflict theory believe that religion may reinforce social inequalities and power relations. Also, Durkheim has been criticized for defining society as the ultimate object of religious worship. Many researchers believe that people worship God rather than society. From this point, the explanation given by Durkheim does not take into account the spiritual dimension of religion.

Interpretive sociologists state that Durkheim paid more attention to the collective aspects of religion and less to personal religious experiences and individual faith. Nevertheless, Durkheim's theory remains one of the most well-developed sociological theories of religion because it pays much attention to the relationship between religion and social organization.

Contemporary Relevance

Durkheimian theories are still relevant for modern societies. Religious institutions continue to guide morality and promote social integration through common beliefs and collective rituals. Festivals, pilgrimages, and community celebrations promote social unity and increase group solidarity.

Durkheim's idea about the sacred includes something more than religion. In modern societies, national flags, constitutions, monuments, and other important institutions are highly valued and may become the sacred symbols that unite citizens. The idea of collective effervescence is helpful for explaining the unity experienced during large public events, including religious holidays, national celebrations, sports games, and social movements. Such events promote social integration.

The idea that religion performs social functions helps to understand the role of religion in promoting social integration, cultural continuity, and providing emotional support during crisis. Although societies have

become secularized, religion continues to affect social life in many parts of the world.

3.4.9 Let Us Sum Up

Durkheim articulated that religion is a social institution that contributes to the integration and stabilization of society. Religion was defined as a system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred and uniting people into the moral community. The distinction between the sacred and profane and the study of totemism proved that the meaning of religious symbols was determined by collective beliefs and values.

Religion performs several social functions including social integration, moral regulation, cultural continuity, emotional support, and social control. Despite the fact that the theory of religion by Durkheim has been criticized for overemphasizing consensus and the study of totemism, it is still one of the most influential sociological interpretations of religion.

3.4.10 Keywords

Religion, Sacred, Profane, Totemism, Collective Conscience, Collective Effervescence, Social Integration, Moral Community, Rituals, Social Control.

3.4.11 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain Durkheim's sociological concept of religion.
2. Distinguish between the sacred and the profane according to Durkheim.
3. Describe Durkheim's theory of totemism and its sociological significance.
4. Discuss the major social functions of religion as identified by Durkheim.
5. Critically evaluate Durkheim's theory of religion and its contemporary relevance.

Lesson 3.5 - Study of Suicide

Structure

- 3.5.1 Objectives
- 3.5.2 Introduction
- 3.5.3 Suicide as a Social Phenomenon
- 3.5.4 Social Integration and Social Regulation
- 3.5.5 Concept of Anomie
- 3.5.6 Types of Suicide
- 3.5.7 Significance of the Study
- 3.5.8 Critique of Durkheim's Theory
- 3.5.9 Relevance in Contemporary Society
- 3.5.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5.11 Keywords
- 3.5.12 Self-Assessment Questions

3.5.1 Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain Durkheim's sociological theory of suicide;
- distinguish between individual and sociological explanations of suicide;
- analyse the concepts of social integration and social regulation;
- describe the four types of suicide identified by Durkheim; and
- evaluate the significance and criticisms of Durkheim's study of suicide.

3.5.2 Introduction

Suicide is commonly considered as an individual act caused by individual problems. During a long period of time, suicide has been studied by philosophers, religious leaders, and medical professionals mostly as an individual phenomenon. Émile Durkheim contradicted this perspective stating that suicide is not only an individual act but also a social phenomenon. It is influenced by the functioning of the society.

Durkheim introduced his ideas in the book titled *Suicide* published in 1897. This book became one of the first empirical studies in sociology. Analyzing statistical data collected from different European societies, he discovered that suicide rates differ systematically in various societies and social groups. Such difference cannot be explained individually since personal circumstances of individuals are rather different. Instead, relative constancy of suicide rates in society proves the existence of the influence of social forces.

3.5.3 Suicide as a Social Phenomenon

Durkheim defined suicide as every case of death which resulted from either a positive or negative act of the victim, who knew that the act would produce that result. Even though the act is individually, Durkheim pointed out that the causes were mostly outside the individual himself and within the society.

Prior to Durkheim, suicide was usually attributed to various factors such as madness, alcohol, inheritance, poverty or personal disappointment. Though these factors can be relevant for specific people, they could not explain the differences between societies in the suicide rate.

Durkheim found that suicide rates were constant in one society over time but very different between countries, religions, families and occupations. So, his study proved that the suicide rates reflect some social organization features rather than just the characteristics of individuals.

The study provided such patterns of suicides:

- The suicide rates are different between Protestant and Catholic populations.
- The married persons have lower suicide rates in comparison with single ones.
- The people with high family and community connections are less prone to suicide.
- The prosperous economic times and the economic crises also can cause an increase in the suicide rates under certain conditions.

All these data led to the conclusion made by Durkheim that suicide is caused by the nature of social relationships and the degree of the integration and regulation of society.

According to Durkheim, the suicide rates were the social facts like crime rates or marriage rates. The rates have some regular patterns and can

be studied scientifically using statistics. Analyzing such data, sociologists are able to find out the conditions that lead to suicides. This study made an important methodological contribution in sociology because it demonstrated how the quantitative data can be used for studying the social phenomenon.

3.5.4 Social Integration and Social Regulation

The basis of Durkheim's theory of suicides is the two important sociological concepts: social integration and social regulation. He believes that any society should have a proper combination of these two elements in order to preserve its stability.

Social Integration

Social integration is the degree of the connection of individuals with the family, community, religious organizations, workplace and society in general. People with the high degree of integration feel strong sense of belonging, actively participate in the community life and receive the emotional and social support from others. The low degree of social integration leads to loneliness and isolation; the excessive integration can make people lose their own identity and become ready to sacrificing for the sake of the group. Therefore, both low and high levels of integration can create the conditions which can lead to the suicides.

Social Regulation

Social regulation is the degree of controlling the desires, expectations and behavior of individuals by the norms, values and laws. Social rules help to provide the stability by setting the standards of the acceptable behavior and realistic expectations. In case of low social regulation, people have the uncertainty because of the few limitations for their ambitions or desires. The rapid changes in the economic or social situation can destroy the existing norms creating confusion and dissatisfaction. Durkheim called this state the anomy or normlessness.

On the other hand, the excessive social regulation strictly limits the personal freedom and controls individuals' actions. This situation also can create the hopelessness and despair. According to Durkheim, societies have the balance between the integration and regulation providing both personal freedom and social stability. Otherwise, there appear the conditions which cause the suicides.

3.5.5 Concept of Anomie

One of the most interesting concepts in sociology provided by Durkheim is anomie, which literally connotes normlessness or absence of the effective social regulation. Durkheim used this concept for description of the situations in which society does not give the clear moral guidance and social rules of the regulation of human behavior.

Society usually regulates the human desires by the established norms, values and expectations. These social rules help individuals to understand their rights, duties and proper desires. But during the period of the rapid social or economic changes, the norms disappear or become ineffective. And people start to feel the uncertainty because the traditional standards which used to guide them do not work anymore.

Durkheim thought that the rapid industrialization, economic crisis, unemployment, political instability and sudden social transformations can cause the anomy. And during such times, people fail to adjust their expectations to the new reality of society. The concept of anomy is used beyond the theory of suicides. Further sociologists used it to explain such social problems as crimes, deviances, alienations and the decline of community life in modern societies. That is why the anomie is considered to be one of the most interesting classical sociological concepts.

3.5.6 Types of Suicide

Four types of suicides are distinguished by Durkheim depending on variations in social integration and social regulation. The Durkheim states that the suicide is caused not by one factor but by the imbalance in the relations of individuals and society. Two of them are associated with the difference in the level of the social integration and the other two with the variations in social regulation.

These four types of suicides are:

- Egoistic suicide
- Altruistic suicide
- Anomic suicide
- Fatalistic suicide

Every of these types shows the specific social condition and demonstrates how the structure of society affects the human behavior.

1. Egoistic Suicide

Egoistic suicide takes place when individuals are insufficiently integrated into society. The weak social bonds, lack of participation in collective life and poor social connections reduce the sense of belonging and purpose. As Durkheim thinks, humans need the close relationships with the family, friends, religious organizations and other social groups. These connections provide the emotional support, moral guidance and identity for people. The lack of such connections makes individuals socially isolated and lonely.

According to the study made by Durkheim, the suicide rates were higher in those people who were poorly connected to social institutions. For example, the married persons had the lower rates of suicides in comparison with singles because marriage increases the social integration through family duties and emotional connections. He also studied differences in religious groups and discovered that rates of suicides were lower among Catholics than among Protestants. Durkheim claimed that Catholics tended to live more collectively than Protestants and the latter were more individualistic.

Conditions that are conducive to egoistic suicides can emerge in modern societies as well. Rapid urbanization, migration, transformations of family structure and increasing individualism may undermine traditional social relations and leave some people without any social or emotional support.

Characteristics of Egoistic Suicide

- Results from low social integration.
- The individual feels lonely and socially isolated.
- Low attachment to family, religion or community.
- More emphasis on individual interests than collective life.
- Common among highly individualistic societies.

2. Altruistic Suicide

Altruistic suicide takes place when social integration is too strong. In this situation, the individual identifies himself/herself with the collective group so much that he/she is ready to sacrifice his/her life for what is thought to be the benefit of the collectivity. The distinction from egoistic suicide is that in the former case individuals do not belong to society,

while in the latter case they sacrifice their lives in the interest of the collective.

Durkheim believed that this kind of suicide is typical for traditional societies when loyalty to the family, tribe, military organization or religious group is very strong. Individuals may think that dying is a moral or heroic act which brings benefit to society. There are many historical examples such as warriors dying in the battles for the good of the collectivity, individuals who die protecting others in wars or calamities and even ritual suicides in certain historical societies. All such acts were socially approved and perceived as courageous, loyal or religious acts.

Durkheim emphasized that altruistic suicide does not result from personal despair but from excessive identification with collective values and obligations.

Characteristics of Altruistic Suicide

- Results from excessive social integration.
- Collective identity prevails individual identity.
- Feeling of strong obligation to the group.
- Society encourages suicides for the sake of the group.
- Prevalent in highly cohesive traditional societies and disciplined organizations.

3. Anomic Suicide

Anomic suicide results from insufficient social regulation. It takes place when society does not provide individuals with adequate norms and moral guidance and people have no clear understanding of what goals and expectations are allowed. Durkheim called the state of normlessness anomie which means the weakening of traditional rules in society. In the period of fast economic development, financial crisis, political instability, technological changes or social changes, traditional rules become inefficient in regulating individual aspirations.

According to Durkheim, desires of humans are potentially unlimited. Society creates rules to regulate ambitions and set realistic expectations. When such regulatory mechanism is undermined, people face frustrations because there are no limits to desires. Even positive economic changes can lead to unattainable expectations and frustrations. Durkheim observed that suicides increased not only during economic recession but also in the period of fast development. In both cases, changes in society weakened

social norms and provided uncertainty regarding roles, ambitions and expectations.

Modern societies in the period of industrialization, globalization, technological changes or economic transformation can face conditions similar to anomie. Unstable employment, changed family relations, financial instability and disorganization can undermine traditional systems of regulation and lead to stress.

Characteristics of Anomic Suicide

- Results from low social regulation.
- Normlessness (anomie).
- Prevalent during rapid social or economic changes.
- Social norms become weak or unclear.
- Individual experiences uncertainty and frustration.

4. Fatalistic Suicide

Fatalistic suicide takes place when social regulation is excessive. People live in highly restricting conditions when their freedom, aspirations and personal choice are strongly limited. Durkheim considered this form of suicide less common than others, but included it into his theoretical scheme. Fatalistic suicide takes place when individuals consider their future as fully controlled by rigid authority and there is no possibility of change.

Some examples can include people living under extreme oppression, punishment and very authoritarian regime when freedom of individuals is restricted almost completely. In such conditions, people can lose all hopes because they think that nothing will improve. Although Durkheim paid little attention to fatalistic suicide, later sociologists used this term in order to define situations of excessive social control, imprisonment, slavery and other forms of social oppression.

Characteristics of Fatalistic Suicide

- Results from excessive social regulation.
- Rigid control and lack of freedom.
- The future looks predetermined and hopeless.
- Typical for highly authoritarian conditions.
- The least discussed type in Durkheim's work.

The Relationship between Social Integration, Social Regulation and Types of Suicide

Durkheim summarized the relationship between social conditions and suicide as follows:

This classification shows that suicide is not just an individual act but a product of certain social conditions. Durkheim claimed that societies operate best when both social integration and social regulation are maintained on the balanced level. Either excess or deficiency of one of the two factors can disrupt social life and provoke suicides.

Durkheim's theory of suicides became one of the most influential sociological explanations of suicide and still guides researchers in studying social isolation, community life, mental well-being and consequences of social change.

3.5.7 Significance of the Study

It is recognized that Suicide by Durkheim is one of the most important works in the history of sociology. This work showed that sociology can explain even highly personal acts through social structures and social relations. This study set new standards for sociological research and raised the prestige of sociology as an independent science.

Suicide as a Social Fact

One of the greatest achievements of Durkheim was his showing that suicide is a social fact. Even though suicide is an act of individuals, the overall rate of suicide in society is defined not by personal circumstances but by general social conditions. Durkheim showed that the rate of suicides remains stable in society over time but differs from society to society and from social groups to social groups. Such regularity shows that social factors affect individual behavior. It supported his general position that sociology should study social phenomena objectively.

Scientific Development of Sociology

Durkheim's study is one of the first examples in which the methods of the exact science were used to research social problems. He used statistics, comparison, and observation instead of philosophy and moral judgment. The use of quantitative data proved the possibility to test sociological explanation using the empirical evidence. This way of research became the basis for modern sociological studies and

the encouragement for using the statistics in sociology, criminology, demography, and medicine.

Importance of Social Integration

The research revealed that social connections play in maintaining psychological well-being of the individual. The results showed that the existence of strong family ties, community, religion, and social connections decrease the probability of suicide due to higher level of social integration. Contemporary studies prove the role of supportive social environment for better mental state of the person while social isolation increases vulnerability to psychological distress.

Importance of Social Regulation

Durkheim paid attention to the necessity for society to provide proper moral regulation. Laws, custom, institutions and common values help individuals to form adequate expectations and stabilize social situation. Changes in social or economic situation lead to the decrease of the power of regulation that creates uncertainty and frustration. The notion of anomie is still very important for understanding the social consequences of unemployment, economic instability, technological changes and decreasing of social institutions.

3.5.8 Critique of Durkheim's Theory

Even though the study is still considered one of the milestones in sociology, there are several critiques of Durkheim's theory.

Excessive Attention to Social Aspects

The most important critique is that Durkheim attributed too much importance to social conditions while ignoring psychological factors of suicide. The modern studies show that mental disorders, depression, drugs abuse, personality disorders, trauma also play important role in suicides. It is necessary to take into account both social and psychological aspects.

Reliability of Statistics

Durkheim conducted extensive analysis of official suicide statistics obtained in the nineteenth century. Later researchers expressed doubts about the accuracy of the statistics because different methods of suicide classification were used in different countries at different times.

Such factors as religious beliefs, legal regulations, and social stigma can also affect the suicide cases reported and thus reduce the reliability of some statistical comparisons.

Overlooking Individual Motivation

From the perspective of interpretivist, Durkheim pays attention to general social patterns while paying no attention to the personal motivations of individual. The interpretivist Max Weber believed that sociology should try to understand human behavior through examination of motives, intentions and subjective experiences. In such way, only statistical analysis is not enough to understand why exactly a particular individual commits suicide.

Absence of Cultural Diversity

Durkheim conducted his study using the examples of the European society of the nineteenth century. The critics claim that the patterns of suicides can vary among different societies because of different family organization, religion, social values, and economic situation in society.

Rigidity of Classification

There is an opinion that the classification of suicide in four types is too rigid. In reality, the suicide of a particular individual may be caused by combination of different factors involving both social integration and regulation as well as psychology, biology, and environmental circumstances.

Thus, contemporary research uses multidisciplinary approach combining sociological, psychological, medical, and public health perspectives. Nevertheless, even despite these critiques, the theory of Durkheim is one of the milestones of sociology since it proves the importance of the analysis of individual behavior within its social context.

3.5.9 Relevance in Contemporary Society

Even after more than a hundred years of publication, the theory of Durkheim provides important insights into contemporary society. Rapid urbanization, globalization, technological advance, migration and change of family structure have changed the forms of social interactions. There are many people who face weakened connections within community, social isolation, and decreased participation in traditional social institutions. In such way, the concept of social integration becomes very important for analysis of modern society. At the same time, economic recession,

unemployment, financial instability, and fast social change often create similar to anomie conditions. Individuals can experience uncertainty about their job position, family roles and expectations for the future proving the importance of social regulation.

Moreover, the theory helps to understand why social support networks, educational institutions, workplace, religious organizations, and community organizations help people because of stronger social connections and moral regulation. Although the current research on suicide combines sociological, psychological, biological, and medical perspectives, the main idea of the theory of Durkheim remains relevant – suicide is a social phenomenon. His theory remains important for sociological research and suicide prevention programs.

3.5.10 Let Us Sum Up

In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim revealed that suicide is a social phenomenon that is determined by social patterns of integration and regulation. Analyzing official statistics from different societies, he proved that the rate of suicide varies according to the social situation of the individuals rather than personal psychology. Thus, the research proved the nature of suicide as the social fact and demonstrated the potential of sociology as a science.

He identified four types of suicide viz. egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. Each type is determined by particular level of social integration and regulation. The theory highlights the importance of social relations, moral regulation and stability of social institutions for well-being of individuals. Despite the later critiques of methodology and results, the theory of Durkheim remains one of the most important theoretical works in sociology and contributes to the research on social cohesions and changes.

3.5.11 Keywords

Suicide, Social Integration, Social Regulation, Egoistic Suicide, Altruistic Suicide, Anomic Suicide, Fatalistic Suicide, Anomie, Social Facts, Empirical Sociology.

3.5.12 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain why Durkheim regarded suicide as a social phenomenon rather than merely an individual act.
2. Discuss the concepts of social integration and social regulation in Durkheim's theory of suicide.

3. Describe the four types of suicide identified by Durkheim with suitable explanations.
4. Evaluate the sociological significance of Durkheim's study of suicide.
5. Critically examine the major criticisms and contemporary relevance of Durkheim's theory of suicide.

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UNIT – IV**Max Weber****Introduction**

Max Weber (1864-1920) is one of the most distinguished classical sociological thinkers and is seen as one of the main fathers of modern sociological thought. While Marxist theory explains society mainly in terms of economy and class struggle, Durkheimian sociology emphasizes social facts and collective consciousness, Max Weber proposed the interpretation approach, which emphasizes the meanings of human actions. According to Weber, sociologist should not only explain but also interpret the motives, values and intentions behind human actions. Such methodological approach, known as *Verstehen*, became one of the most prominent sociological traditions.

Weber's contributions to sociology do not limit to methodology. He developed the theory of social action as the basis of sociological analysis, classified legitimate authority in three types (traditional, charismatic, rational-legal), and presented bureaucracy as the model of administration. His pioneering work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* analyzed the relationship between religion and economic life claiming that some of Protestant ethics led to the emergence of modern capitalism in Western Europe. By his comparative research of world religions Weber showed that ideas, beliefs and values can shape the course of social action and historical development. This unit discusses Max Weber's major theoretical achievements especially in connection with *Verstehen*, Social Action, Types of Authority, Bureaucracy, World Religions, and Western Capitalism.

Objectives

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- Explain Max Weber's intellectual background and his contribution to interpretive sociology.
- Describe the concept of *Verstehen* and its importance in sociological research.

- Explain Weber's concept of social action and identify its essential characteristics.
- Discuss the four types of social action and their sociological significance.
- Distinguish between power and authority and explain Weber's three ideal types of legitimate authority.
- Examine the concept, characteristics, advantages, and limitations of bureaucracy.
- Analyse Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic and its relationship to the emergence of Western capitalism.
- Compare Weber's interpretation of major world religions and their influence on economic behaviour.
- Critically evaluate Weber's contributions and their relevance to contemporary sociology.

Unit Structure

Lesson 4.1 Max Weber and the Foundations of Interpretive Sociology

Lesson 4.2 Social Action

Lesson 4.3 Types of Authority and Bureaucracy

Lesson 4.4 World Religions and Western Capitalism

Lesson 4.1 - Max Weber and the Development of Interpretive Sociology

Structure

- 4.1.1 Objectives
- 4.1.2 Introduction
- 4.1.3 Intellectual Background
- 4.1.4 Sociology According to Weber
- 4.1.5 Verstehen (Interpretive Understanding)
- 4.1.6 Value Neutrality and Objectivity
- 4.1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.1.8 Keywords
- 4.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

4.1.1 Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- discuss Max Weber's intellectual background and contributions to interpretive sociology;
- define and discuss the concept of Verstehen and its role in sociological analysis; and
- examine Weber's ideas about value neutrality, objectivity and scientific approach to society.

4.1.2 Introduction

Development of sociology as an academic discipline is linked to the contributions of several classical sociological thinkers who tried to explain the nature of modern society. One of these sociologists, Max Weber, played a special role in the history of sociology because he changed the focus of sociological investigation from society itself to the meaningful actions of people. While Auguste Comte saw sociology as a science based on observations and Durkheim emphasized the objective nature of social facts, Max Weber claimed that society can be understood only by interpreting the meanings people give to their actions. This idea became the foundation of interpretive sociology, which is one of the most influential sociological paradigms of in the contemporary society.

It does not mean that Weber refused scientific methods. On the contrary, he claimed that the social sciences need specific methods appropriate for understanding the peculiarities of human behavior. Humans are different from physical objects in that they are intentional, valuated, emotional and goal-oriented agents. As a result, sociologists have to understand not only what people do but also why they behave in the way they behave. This method of interpretive understanding, which Weber called *Verstehen*, became one of the basic components of Weber's sociology.

Another important contribution of Weber to sociological thought is his belief in the possibility of objectivity in sociological research in spite of the fact that sociologists deal with value-laden social phenomena. Weber made the distinction between personal values of a sociologist-researcher and scientific investigation of social reality and coined the term 'value neutrality'. Besides, he developed a methodological approach that combines historical, comparative and causal analysis of social processes such as the emergence of capitalism, development of bureaucracy and the impact of religion on economic life.

This lesson presents the intellectual background of Weber and the main methodological ideas in his sociology. The development of interpretive sociology, the concept of *Verstehen* and Weber's approach to scientific objectivity are discussed. These ideas constitute the conceptual background of the discussion of Weber's sociological theories, which are presented in following lessons.

4.1.3 Intellectual Background

Max Weber (1864-1920) was one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century and is considered as one of the founders of modern sociology. His contribution extends far beyond sociology including economics, political science, history, law and philosophy of social sciences. The interdisciplinary approach of Weber allows analyzing society from the multiple angles and makes his works relevant to a wide range of disciplines.

Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Germany in a wealthy and intellectually active family. His father was a politician-lawyer engaged in public affairs, while his mother was a pious woman with strong religious beliefs and moral qualities. Weber was influenced by the diversity of intellectual traditions in the family where political pragmatism and religious idealism coexisted. The ideas that were formed during this period of time determined his interest in the analysis of the relationship between ideas, religion, politics and economic life.

Weber received education in law at the University of Heidelberg and then continued his education in the field of economics, history, philosophy and jurisprudence. In contrast to many scholars who specialized in one discipline, Weber believed that social phenomena can be understood only through interdisciplinary approach. During his academic career, Weber used historical data, economic and sociological analysis to explore the evolution of modern societies.

Germany was experiencing rapid industrialization, urbanization and political transformations in the second half of the nineteenth century. Capitalist mode of production was developing, bureaucratic administration became more advanced, and democracy was growing. These social transformations determined the interests of Weber. He was interested in the question of differences between modern and traditional societies and the distinct path of development of Western Europe.

In contrast to Marx, who believed in economic relations as the major motor of history, Weber argued that there are many factors that influence social changes. Economic interests are indeed important, but ideas, beliefs, values, religion, law and politics are also shaping human behavior and historical process. In the same manner, in contrast to Durkheim, who considered society as an objective reality that exists above people, Weber claimed that society is constantly created and recreated through the meaningful actions of people. This focus on human agency is one of the main features of Weber's sociology.

Weber's scientific interests were extremely broad. His most famous works are *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, *Economy and Society*, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, *The Religion of China*, *The Religion of India*, and *Ancient Judaism*. Some of Weber's works were published after his death; still, they have formed an integrated framework of concepts allowing analyzing the modern society by means of social action, authority, bureaucracy, rationalization, and religion.

The outstanding achievement of Weber was the demonstration that sociology cannot only reveal statistical regularities or laws but also interpret the meanings of human behavior. Weber claimed that social life can be studied not only from the perspective of external behavior. In order to explain social processes, researchers should interpret motives, intentions, beliefs, and values influencing human actions. As a result, sociology turned into both explanatory and interpretive science.

Weber's ideas have influenced many fields such as organizational behavior, political sociology, economic sociology, religious studies, public administration, and development studies. Such Weberian concepts as bureaucracy, authority, rationalization, and social action are widely used in the analysis of governments, corporations, education, and organizations.

4.1.4 Sociology According to Weber

One of the most important Weber's contributions was his definition of sociology. He claimed that sociology differs from the natural sciences in its object which is meaningful human behavior rather than physical things and natural phenomena. Natural scientists explain the events by means of physical laws; sociologists should understand the meanings attributed to actions before explaining their social consequences.

Weber defined sociology as a science seeking interpretive understanding of social action to give causal explanation of its course and consequences. This definition includes three related notions as given below:

Interpretive understanding, social action, and causal explanation.

First of all, it includes interpretive understanding. All human actions are caused by intentions, beliefs, expectations, and values. Two people can execute the same action but for totally different reasons. External behavior is only a part of understanding social reality; in order to understand it completely, sociology must find out the meanings motivating individuals.

Secondly, sociology is concerned with social action. Not all human activities are social. An action is social when it is oriented consciously toward the behavior of other individuals. Saying hello to a colleague, voting at elections, performing religious rites, making deals, obeying traffic rules are the examples of social actions as they require taking into account others' behavior. Purely reflexive or accidental actions usually are not subjects of sociology as they are devoid of social meaning.

Finally, sociology seeks causal explanation. Weber did not think that mere interpretation is enough. Sociologists should discover causes and effects of social actions as well. Understanding the reasons for certain actions allows understanding social institutions and history in general. Thus, explanation complements the interpretation in sociological science.

This definition reflects the specific Weber's approach to sociology. The society is not conceived as some abstract entity existing independent of individuals; on the contrary, it arises due to millions of meaningful actions of individuals in their daily life. Governments, markets, religions,

education, and families exist because individuals constantly carry out patterned social actions. Consequently, understanding individuals turns into the understanding of society.

Unlike positivist sociologists, Weber did not expect sociology to discover universal laws similar to laws of physics or chemistry. Human societies are historically specific, culturally various, and influenced by variable values. For this reason, sociology explains social events by means of historical analysis, comparative methods, and interpretive understanding.

Weber's conception of sociology has formed a balanced methodological approach. It rejects the subjectivism of interpretation which lacks evidences as well as the rigid determinism reducing human actions to social forces. Through combination of meaning and causation, Weber has created a methodological approach that continues to shape sociological qualitative and comparative researches.

4.1.5 Verstehen (Interpretive Understanding)

One of the most important contributions of Max Weber to the methodology of sociology is the concept of Verstehen. It is a German word meaning understanding, interpretive understanding, or empathic comprehension. Weber stated that sociology differs fundamentally from the natural sciences as its object are conscious human beings who attribute meanings to their actions. Thus, the task of sociology is not only to observe their actions but also to understand the meanings they attribute to them.

For Weber, social reality cannot be explained only through statistics, measurements, or observations. Human actions are caused by beliefs, intentions, emotions, values, and expectations. These motives cannot be observed directly as physical phenomena. However, sociologists must interpret the meanings attributed to actions by individuals. This process of understanding meanings of actions is called Verstehen by Weber.

The concept of Verstehen does not imply sympathy or approval of actions. On the contrary, it demands interpretation of an action from the actor's perspective. A sociologist researching religious rites, political demonstrations, voting, or interaction in workplace should try to understand the reasons of such behavior, regardless of his or her personal attitude to these actions.

For instance, two workers can work overtime. One of them may be stimulated by material inducements while another one may work because

of professional enthusiasm or ambition. Though observable behavior is the same, meanings of actions are quite different. Weber stated that sociological explanation should account for these differences of motivations.

Nature of Verstehen

Weber considered Verstehen as scientific method rather than intuition or purely philosophical endeavor. The interpretation should be based on systematic observations, historical evidence, interviews, documents, and logical reasoning. The researcher reconstructs the meaning of an action by means of analysis of the social and cultural context where it happens.

The interpretive understanding combines two related goals viz.

- determining the subjective meaning of an action and
- explaining its role in broader social processes.

Thus, Verstehen is a link between individual behavior and social structure.

Types of Verstehen

Weber distinguished between two forms of interpretive understanding

Direct Observational Understanding

Direct understanding means the comprehension of an action based on direct observation. Some actions are understandable in terms of expressions, gestures, tones of voice or behavior. Thus, smiles mean happiness, crying is a sign of sorrow, applause usually denotes gratitude. These meanings do not need further investigation since they are observable. However, the mere observation is not sufficient for sociological explanation because it does not provide insight into the motives of actions.

Explanatory or Motivational Understanding

Explanatory understanding seeks to comprehend the motives, intentions, beliefs or values that make an individual act in a certain way. In order to explain a motivation of an action, a sociologist should analyze the social environment, culture, history and aims of the actor. For example, a donation of a person to charity organization might be motivated by religion, compassion, prestige or taxes. The external action is the same, but the motivations are different. Comprehension of the motives makes possible to explain why the same actions take place in various social conditions. Weber considered the explanatory understanding to be more valuable

than the direct observational one as sociology should both describe and explain actions.

Importance of Verstehen in Sociology

The concept of Verstehen changed the paradigm of sociological research and emphasized the fact that social actions are meaningful, not mechanical. People are not just reacting to external stimuli; they interpret a situation, choose an action and perform according to their beliefs and values.

Such approach stimulated sociologists to study culture, religion, symbols, languages and interpersonal interaction as very important aspects of social life. Moreover, Verstehen contributed to later developments such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology and qualitative research methods. Additionally, it allows to appreciate the cultural diversity because the practices that seem meaningless from one cultural perspective can have symbolic or religious meaning in another society. Interpretation helps researchers not to fall into ethnocentrism and analyze social behavior impartially.

Limitations of Verstehen

Despite its importance, the concept met criticism due to the fact that interpretation always implies the possibility of subjectivity, which is inevitable when researchers interpret meanings and not just observe them. Different researchers can interpret the same behavior differently thus reducing consistency of sociological analysis.

It is not easy to check if the meanings attributed to an action by the researcher are really the true meanings. Human motivations are complicated and can vary during the time or even remain unconscious. Another drawback is that Verstehen is more suitable for studying small-scale interactions, while sociologists study large social systems with millions of people. Nevertheless, Weber believed that even institutions are created due to meaningful actions of people and that is why interpretive understanding is necessary in sociology.

4.1.6 Value Neutrality and Objectivity

Another important contribution of Max Weber to methodology is his doctrine of value neutrality (Wertfreiheit). Weber realized that sociologists investigate such themes as religion, politics, inequality, crime, family,

culture and others, which have moral beliefs and personal opinions. Thus, the problem is to guarantee that the scientific research will not be affected by the researcher's values.

According to Weber, sociology should be value-neutral, that is, the researcher should not allow any of his personal beliefs, political preferences or moral judgment affect the collection, analysis and interpretation of evidence. The aim of sociology is to explain social phenomena, not to define what is morally good or bad.

Value neutrality does not mean that the researcher has no values. Weber believed that absolute freedom from values is impossible because each individual is influenced by culture, education, religion and personal experience. However, the scholar should be aware of his personal conviction and separate it from scientific analysis. For example, a sociologist investigating poverty may consider it to be unjust. Nevertheless, while researching the issue, he should objectively investigate its reasons, consequences and social patterns, without being influenced by his feelings.

Value Relevance and Value Neutrality

Weber introduced an important distinction between value relevance and value neutrality. Value relevance means the choice of research topics. Often, researchers choose the topic for investigation because they believe it to be socially significant. Issues such as unemployment, environmental degradation, gender inequality or digital surveillance become research topics because they are important social problems. However, as soon as the research starts, value neutrality demands from the researcher to analyze evidence objectively and not to manipulate results to prove his personal beliefs or ideologies. This distinction allows the sociologist to deal with socially relevant issues without losing scientific credibility.

Objectivity in Social Research

Weber was convinced that sociology can be very objective despite studying human behavior. Scientific objectivity requires systematic methods, credible evidence, rationality and clarity of the analysis.

Objectivity includes the following:

- collection of reliable empirical evidence;
- consistent use of research methods;
- discrimination of facts from personal opinion;
- presentation of conclusions supported by evidence and

- the possibility for findings to be critically analyzed by other researchers.

Although the absolute objectivity is hardly possible, Weber believed it to be an important ideal of scientific investigation.

Weber's Methodological Approach

Weber combined several methodological approaches in sociological research as given below:

- Interpretive understanding (Verstehen) in order to discover the subjective meanings.
- Historical analysis in order to understand the evolution of institutions.
- Comparative analysis in order to explain similarities and differences among societies.
- Causal explanation in order to discover the relationship between social phenomena.

This combined approach is demonstrated by The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, where Weber compares different religions and shows how certain religious values led to creation of modern capitalism in Western Europe. Instead of explaining capitalism exclusively in economic terms, Weber demonstrates that cultural and religious ideas can also affect economic behavior. Thus, his methodology emphasizes the interaction of economic, political, religious and cultural factors.

Significance of Weber's Methodology

Weber's methodological ideas continue to be relevant to modern sociological research. Qualitative methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, case study, ethnography and narrative analysis reflect Weber's approach to the understanding of subjective meanings.

Similarly, his concept of value neutrality is a cornerstone of scientific research. Although complete neutrality is hardly achievable, researchers are supposed to minimize their personal biases, report evidence honestly and distinguish empirical findings from personal opinions.

Interpreting human experience scientifically made it possible for Weber to develop a methodology that has been used extensively in sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, and public administration. Understanding society implies both empathizing with human experience and making scientific interpretations.

4.1.7 Let us sum up

Among the principal figures in the history of interpretive sociology, there was Max Weber, who proposed an innovative approach that required the interpretation of meanings that people give to their actions. In contrast to positivist scholars who viewed society as governed by objective laws, Weber claimed that sociology should explain the social action by exploring the motives, beliefs, values, and intentions of humans. The definition of sociology given by Weber as the interpretive understanding of social action laid the foundations for a special sociological perspective that combines subjective meaning and causal explanation.

The idea of Verstehen plays a crucial role in Weber's methodology. Thanks to it, sociologists are capable of going beyond the observation of the observable behavior of people and understanding subjective meanings that underlie human actions. The distinction between observational and explanatory or motivational understanding made by Weber is very important for qualitative research in the contemporary society.

One more important idea introduced by Weber is that of value neutrality. Even though scientists have their own values, according to Weber, they should not play any part in scientific research and should not affect neither the conduct nor the interpretation of the results. The aim of sociology should be objectivity achieved with the help of systematic procedures, observations, logical thinking and criticism. Weber's idea of value-relevance and value-neutrality still matters in social research ethics and methodology.

The combination of all above mentioned ideas — the theory of interpretive sociology, Verstehen and value neutrality — has become a basis for the methodology of Weber that reconciles subjective human experience with scientific explanation. All the above mentioned ideas form the theoretical base for Weber's theories on social action, types of authority, bureaucracy, religion, and the emergence of capitalism in the modern world presented in the following lessons of this unit.

4.1.8 Keywords

Max Weber, Interpretive Sociology, Verstehen, Value Neutrality, Objectivity, Causal Explanation, Value Relevance

4.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain Max Weber's concept of interpretive sociology. How does it differ from the positivist approach to sociology?
2. What is *Verstehen*? Discuss its meaning, types, and significance in sociological research.
3. Distinguish between direct observational understanding and explanatory understanding with suitable examples.
4. Discuss Weber's concept of value neutrality. How does it contribute to maintaining objectivity in social research?
5. Examine the methodological contributions of Max Weber to sociology, with particular reference to *Verstehen*, value neutrality, and causal explanation.

Lesson 4.2 - Social Action

Structure

- 4.2.1 Objectives
- 4.2.2 Introduction
- 4.2.3 Meaning of Social Action
- 4.2.4 Elements of Social Action
- 4.2.5 Types of Social Action
- 4.2.6 Social Action and Social Relationships
- 4.2.7 Significance of Weber's Theory of Social Action
- 4.2.8 Criticisms of Weber's Theory of Social Action
- 4.2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.2.10 Keywords
- 4.2.11 Self-Assessment Questions

4.2.1 Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define social action and explain its importance in sociology;
- Discern between types of social action and analyze their peculiarities; and
- Discuss the relationship between social action, social relations, and the operation of society.

4.2.2 Introduction

Social action is the central category in the sociological theory of Max Weber. In fact, Weber believed that social action should be considered as the basic unit of sociological analysis. Unlike previous sociologists who paid attention mostly to society, institutions, or social facts, Weber claimed that sociology had to start from the actions of individuals. However, not any human action belongs to the field of sociology. The actions of people to which individuals attach certain meanings and which take into account the presence, behavior, or the reactions of other people are called social actions.

Weber formulated the idea of social action to explain how the actions of individuals lead to the formation of certain social institutions. Any institution whether it is a family, economy, state, religion, or education functions owing to many actions performed by individuals. Exploring the causes of actions and the relations between the actions of people, sociologists are capable of explaining the emergence, maintenance, and changes in social institutions.

Unlike biological and instinctive actions of people, social actions are deliberate and meaningful. Humans evaluate situations, interpret the behavior of other people, and choose certain actions. Thus, unlike deterministic approaches that consider the behavior of humans caused only by economic situation, biological instincts, or certain social factors, Weber took into account the active reaction of individuals to their social environment.

The idea of social action is extremely important in contemporary sociology. The theory of social action gives a possibility to explain everyday interactions, organizational behavior, political activities, consumption, religion and digital communications. Participating in elections, using social networks, buying something online, or performing any other actions, humans act based on meanings, expectations, and relations to other people. Hence, the theory of social action helps to comprehend both traditional and modern societies.

4.2.3 Meaning of Social Action

Max Weber defined sociology as the science which studies the interpretive understanding of social action in order to come up with causal explanation of its course and consequences. Hence, social action becomes the core of sociological theory.

In his view, social action is any action performed by individuals that has subjective meaning and takes into account the behavior, presence, or expected reactions of other people. The action may depend on the past, present or future behavior of other people. Thus, social action always includes relations to other people and cannot be analyzed without taking into account the social context.

The importance of subjective meaning is crucial for Weber's theory. People do not act just because of some external stimuli but they interpret the situation and find meanings before performing any actions. Therefore, even if two people perform identical action, they may have completely

different motives. Sociological analysis should discover these underlying motives to explain actions of people correctly.

For instance, two people can donate money to some charitable organization. One person can do it due to his/her sympathy towards poor people, and another person may do it for getting reputation. Although the actions are identical from the point of perspective of sociologist, subjective meanings are different. Weber stated that the aim of sociological analysis is discovery of these underlying meanings.

Attending a religious service may be caused by the desire of spiritual enrichment, family traditions, social obligations, or professional networking. Thus, the identical behavior can be performed owing to different types of social actions depending on the motives of an individual.

Characteristics of Social Action

Weber pointed out several aspects that differentiate social action from other types of human behavior.

(i) It is performed by Individuals

Social action originates from individuals, not from such abstract categories as society or institution. Although it seems that organizations or governments act collectively, the decisions of organizations and governments are performed by individuals who occupy certain positions.

(ii) It Possesses Subjective Meaning

Every social action is meaningful to the actor. Individuals behave in accordance with their beliefs, purposes, values, emotions, or traditions. The aim of sociological research is to comprehend these meanings.

It is irrelevant whether the meaning is true or false; what counts is the meaning given by the actor of the action.

(iii) It is Oriented Towards Others

The distinctive feature of social action is that it is oriented toward other people. While acting, an individual expects, responds to, or considers the behavior of others. Examples are saying hello to a colleague, concluding a business deal, teaching students, voting in an election, or observing traffic rules. All these examples of actions are oriented towards other people or groups.

(iv) It is Intentional

Social action is always intentional. Individuals intentionally choose a course of actions and implement it to achieve certain purposes or to express some values. Even actions motivated by emotions or tradition have their intentional meaning for the actor.

(v) It Occurs within a Social Context

The meaning of an action depends on its social and cultural context. For example, forms of greetings, dressing, religious ceremonies, or manners of communication may be different in various societies. Sociologists must therefore interpret the actions in their social and cultural context.

Actions That Are Not Social Actions

Weber emphasized that not every human action was a social action. There were actions that had no orientation towards other people or that were the reactions of our organism.

Such actions included the following:

- unconditional reflexes, such as sneezing or blinking;
- unintentional collisions between strangers;
- organic processes like digestion and heartbeats; and
- actions alone, without thinking of any other people.

Thus, if two individuals simultaneously open umbrellas because it began to rain, their actions will not be social actions because they are parallel responses to a natural phenomenon. However, if one of them opens an umbrella because of the suggestion of another one, his/her action will become social because it is influenced by the behavior of another person.

4.2.4 Elements of Social Action

Four basic elements of social action are important in order to understand the concept put forward by Weber. They distinguish meaningful social behavior from ordinary physical activity.

Subjective Meaning

The first element is subjective meaning. Social action always includes subjective meaning. Individuals do something not only because of the circumstances but also because of the meanings that they see in them. The subjective meanings may be caused by individuals' beliefs, values,

emotions, habits, or rational calculation. They direct the behavior of individuals and shape their social relations.

Orientation Towards Others

The second element is orientation towards the actions or expected responses of other people. Social behavior always happens in a web of interactions where individuals consider how other people are going to react. Thus, for example, the students prepare for exams taking into consideration teachers' expectations and the ways of evaluating their work. The employers develop the policies of their enterprises taking into consideration employees' behavior, objectives of their organization, and laws.

Purpose or Motivation

Every social action is driven by some motive. Individuals may follow economic interests, social status, religion, emotions, and morality. Comprehending individuals' motives helps sociologists explain why people take one course of actions and not another in similar situations.

Social Consequences

Although individuals pursue their personal interests, they do so in a way that often produces wider social consequences beyond their intentions. So, for example, the entrepreneurs who pursue their personal profit create jobs and stimulate the economy. In the same way, citizens voting for certain candidates in elections pursue their personal political preferences but at the same time they decide about the government. Therefore, sociology not only analyzes individuals' motives but also the wider social consequences that emerge from numerous actions of individuals.

Significance of the Concept of Social Action

Concept of social action significantly changed sociological theories.

First of all, it directed the sociologists' attention from society as an abstract concept to the individuals who actively participate in social life. Instead of treating people as passive recipients of the social forces, Weber paid attention to their ability to interpret the situations and to make meaningful decisions.

Secondly, it provided the scientific ground for analyzing individuals' subjective meanings without neglecting the empirical research. Using the *Verstehen*, sociologists could analyze the individuals' motivations without breaking methodological standards of scientific research.

Thirdly, social action became the starting point for the understanding of institutions like markets, government, educational system, and religious organizations. They exist because individuals regularly repeat certain meaningful patterns of interaction.

Finally, the approach proposed by Weber still influences modern disciplines like organizational studies, political sociology, economic sociology, and communication studies. Even in the contemporary society the researchers of social media behavior, online communities, consumers' choice, and virtual organizations use the Weberian ideas about meanings and social interactions.

4.2.5 Types of Social Action

The classification of social action into four ideal types is probably one of the most important contributions of Weber to sociological theory. Using the types of social action, sociologists could understand the motives of human behavior. Weber emphasized that these types were ideal types, meaning that they were analytical models rather than the descriptions of reality. At the same time, in real life a certain action could be motivated by more than one type of motivation.

The four types of social action are the following:

- Instrumentally Rational Action (Zweckrational)
- Value-Rational Action (Wertrational)
- Affectual Action
- Traditional Action

These types of actions differ in the motives that guide individuals.

4.2.5.1 Instrumentally Rational Action (Zweckrational)

Instrumentally rational action is the type of actions which are guided by the careful estimation of the most efficient way of reaching certain goal. Individuals examine different variants, estimate their consequences, compare costs and benefits, and choose the variant that will allow them to reach the goal.

For example, a business entrepreneur may choose to introduce new technology in accordance with an analysis of production costs, market demand and profit. In the similar way, a student studying for the examination may make up a schedule of studies in terms of the time available, examination patterns and importance of different subjects.

In both the cases, the individual actions follow rational calculation and selection of means.

Weber maintained that contemporary industrial societies increasingly promote the form of instrumentally rational action. Scientific management, technological innovation, bureaucratic organization and capitalist market all encourage individuals and organizations to achieve efficiency, predictability and economic success. This is a crucial part of what Weber later called 'rationalization'.

4.2.5.2 Value-Rational Action (Wertrational)

Value-rational action is behaviour directed towards an idea, principle or a moral obligation consciously considered to be valuable in itself and irrespective of any practical consequences. People do these actions since they see them as ethically, religiously or culturally valuable and not as a means to obtain some benefits for themselves.

In contrast to instrumentally rational actions, the concern here is not efficiency or success but commitment to values. The actor adheres to certain principles even when following them results in his/her disadvantage and personal losses. People volunteering for humanitarian work, speaking about injustices even under threat to themselves, fasting for religious reasons or refusing to get involved in corrupt practices because of the sense of moral obligation are the examples of value-rational action.

Weber considered value-rational actions to be necessary for the understanding of religions, ethics, political movements and reforms. Many movements throughout history such as movements for national liberation, equal rights and social justice have emerged as a result of actions of people who acted for values rather than for their material benefit. But value-rational actions can also generate contradictions where different groups are guided by different moral or religious beliefs. Since values are culturally based, what one group finds morally right, can be seen otherwise by another.

4.2.5.3 Affectual Action

Affectual action is behaviour influenced primarily by emotions and feelings. People perform these actions spontaneously under the impact of love, anger, fear, sympathy, pride, sorrow, joy or other emotional state rather than through careful thinking and planning. Such actions are usually spontaneous. While they can be meaningful for individuals, they

are usually less predictable than rational actions since emotions can change suddenly. Examples of affectual actions include applauding the speaker after an impressive speech, grieving after losing someone dear, celebrating the victory in a sports game, getting angry in the course of an argument or consoling the suffering friend. In all these cases, people are primarily driven by their emotions.

Weber did not see affectual actions as irrational in the sense of being meaningless. Emotions have their subjective meaning and are therefore also legitimate subjects of sociological analysis. Nevertheless, the affectual actions are usually less stable and systematic than rational actions. In contemporary society, the emotional behaviour remains important in the sphere of family relations, politics, religions, entertainments and social network communications. The public opinion is not only shaped through logic but also through emotions.

4.2.5.4 Traditional Action

Traditional actions are actions performed according to customs, habits and established practices which have become parts of daily routine. People perform these actions since they have been inherited from past generations and are considered traditional ways of acting. In traditional actions, people do not usually ask themselves why they do things in a certain way. Behaviour becomes routine through repeating it and socializing in it.

The examples of traditional actions include participating in cultural festivities, addressing to elders according to the established customs, holding family festivities, dressing in traditional clothes for religious festivities or performing traditional marriage rites. These actions continue since society sees them as appropriate and meaningful traditions. Traditional actions are important factor of social stability since they ensure the continuity of culture and strengthen collective identity. Through customs and traditions, the societies transmit their values, beliefs and norms to future generations.

Table 4.2.1 Comparison of the Four Types of Social Action

Type of Social Action	Primary Motivation	Nature of Action
Instrumentally Rational	Achievement of specific goals through efficient means	Logical, calculated, and goal-oriented

Value-Rational	Commitment to ethical, religious, or moral values	Principle-oriented regardless of consequences
Affectual	Emotions and feelings	Emotional and spontaneous
Traditional	Customs, habits, and traditions	Routine and culturally inherited

But the excess traditionalism can obstruct the social change. Those practices which used to be appropriate become inappropriate in changing economic, technical and political conditions. Weber noted that the modernization leads to replacing traditional actions with rational ones especially within bureaucracies and capitalism.

4.2.6 Social Action and Social Relationships

According to Weber, individual actions do not take place in isolation. Social relationships emerge as the result of repeated patterns of social action. Social relationship exists when two or more people orient their actions towards each other in a relatively stable and meaningful way. The relationships can include cooperation, competition, conflict, exchange, subordination, friendship or solidarity. The difference between social relationship and physical interaction is the presence of mutual orientation and meaning.

The social relationships can differ in duration and intensity. Some of them are temporary such as relations between passengers riding on the same bus, while others are long-lasting such as those within families, educational institutions, workplaces, religious groups or political parties. The repeated interactions turn into institution over time.

Weber maintained that the society itself is the complex of numerous social relationships. Such institutions as the family, the market, the state and bureaucracy are not the external entities standing apart from individuals. They emerge as the result of repeated patterns of meaningful social actions of individuals. Therefore, the understanding of social relationships is important for explaining functioning and continuity of the society. The social relationships also provide predictability in everyday life. Individuals form expectations concerning the behavior of others in different situations. These shared expectations enable cooperation, coordination and social order in human interactions.

Weber was aware of the fact that social relationships are not static but dynamic, that they change according to changes of economic situation, of political system, culture, and technology. For example, new technologies of digital communication have changed friendship, work, commerce, and politics proving that social relations are dynamic and are continually adjusted to the changes of social environment.

4.2.7 Significance of Weber's Theory of Social Action

Weber's theory of social action is one of the key theories in sociology since it allows creating a systematic approach to studying the link between individual behavior and social structure. Weber considered that individuals are not passive products of the society but active participants, who interpret the situation, attribute meanings to their experience and make their decisions depending on it. Such an approach extended the sphere of sociology making it take into account the agency of humans in creating the society.

The first contribution of the theory is its shift of the object of sociological analysis from social institutions to the motivations of human behavior. Weber stated that the social institutions of family, religion, economy, and state should not be considered separately from the meaningful actions of the individuals. As a result, sociology not only studies the observable behavior of people but also takes into account their intentions, beliefs and values.

The second contribution of the theory is its recognition of the importance of subjective meaning in the sociological research. Weber showed that similar actions may be interpreted differently by different people. Analyzing these meanings helps in explaining various behavioral patterns in the course of time and in different societies. This idea had a great impact on qualitative research methods such as participant observation, ethnography, in-depth interviewing and case study research.

The third contribution of the theory is Weber's classification of the types of social action. Such classification gives sociologists a tool of analysis to investigate human behavior in different social settings. It helps to explain why sometimes people act rationally aiming at practical goal achievement, sometimes act following moral rules, sometimes act emotionally and sometimes act according to traditions. Despite the fact that people are often guided by several motives in their actions, the classification still remains valuable for sociological analysis.

Moreover, Weber's theory helps in explaining the social change. Changes in people's values, beliefs and action patterns lead to transformations of social institutions. Analysis of the link between Protestant ethics and the rise of modern capitalism made by Weber shows how changes in ideas and motivations influence economic and political development. Thus, Weber proved that social change cannot be explained by economic and structural factors only, there are cultural and ideological factors that play a key role in this process too.

The concept of social action still remains relevant in our times. In modern organizations, people decide about something taking into account efficiency, ethics, their emotions and organizational traditions. Political involvement, consumption, religion, environmental activity, digital communication — everything in our society involves meaningful social action that is oriented towards somebody else. The rising importance of social networks shows how Weber was right in saying that people constantly change their actions according to expectations of their responses.

Weber's emphasis on the meaning also influenced some later sociological perspectives. Symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology and interpretive sociology are all based on Weber's idea of creation and maintenance of society with the help of meaningful social actions.

4.2.8 Criticisms of Weber's Theory of Social Action

Despite the widespread acceptance of the theory, Weber's theory of social action was subjected to some criticism. First of all, the theory is criticized because it lays the main stress on individual motivations while comparatively little attention is paid to the structural constraints. Some critics, especially Marxist sociologists, claim that such elements as economic inequality, political institutions and social structure often restrict people's choice. So, human actions are determined not only by subjective meanings but by objective social conditions too.

Secondly, there is a problem in defining the subjective meanings of actions. People do not always understand well what motives guide their actions and different researchers may interpret the same actions in different ways. Therefore, the concept of Verstehen introduces some degree of subjectivity in the sociological research.

Some sociologists believe that Weber's classification of actions consists of only four ideal types that simplifies the complexity of human behavior.

People's decisions in their daily life are not usually guided by only one motive. One person's decision may be the result of rational calculation, moral commitment, emotional attitude and traditional behavior. Therefore, the boundaries between four types of social actions are not always clear.

The critics of the theory from functionalist perspective believe that Weber did not pay enough attention to the role of social norms, institutions and collective values in maintaining the social order. While Weber focused on individual actions, functionalists claim that many actions are defined by the needs of the social system.

The next criticism is connected with empirical verification of the theory. Since motives and meanings cannot be observed, they are more difficult to measure than the actions themselves. Therefore, some positivist sociologists doubt if the interpretive sociology achieves the same degree of scientific accuracy as natural sciences.

But despite all these criticisms, the theory remains important. Instead of weakening Weber's contribution, these critics stimulate new developments in sociological theory motivating researchers to combine structural and agency approaches. Contemporary sociology often combines Weber's interpretive approach with the ideas of structural, functional, conflict and interactionist approaches.

4.2.9 Let us sum up

Max Weber considered social action to be the basic unit of sociological analysis. Weber believed that sociology should investigate actions having subjective meaning and being oriented towards the behavior of others. Social action differs from instinctive and purely biological behavior in its intentionality, meaningfulness and social orientation. Analyzing the motives of human actions helps to explain the formation and functioning of social relationships and institutions.

Weber developed a classification of social actions which includes four ideal types as i.e. instrumentally rational action, value-rational action, affectual action and traditional action. These types show the different motivational orientations and serve as an important tool of analysis in sociological research.

The concept of social action explains how social relationships and institutions emerge during repeated interactions between people. Emphasis on the subjective meaning had a great impact on further development of interpretive sociology, symbolic interactionism and qualitative research

methods. The theory is used in the research of organizations, politics, religion, economy, education, and digital society

Although the theory has been attacked for having more concern about the role of individual agency rather than structural determinism, as well as difficulty in decoding subjective meanings, it is undoubtedly one of the most important theories in classical sociology. With his analysis, Weber has made it clear that social life involves not only the interpretation of human motives but also an explanation of the social consequences of those motives.

4.2.10 Keywords

Subjective Meaning, Instrumentally Rational Action, Value-Rational Action, Affectual Action, Traditional Action, Social Relationship

4.2.11 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Define social action according to Max Weber. How does it differ from ordinary human behaviour?
2. Explain the essential characteristics of social action with suitable illustrations.
3. Discuss Weber's four types of social action. How do they differ in terms of motivation and purpose?
4. Examine the relationship between social action and social relationships in Weber's sociology.
5. Critically evaluate the significance and limitations of Weber's theory of social action.

Lesson 4.3 - Types of Authority and Bureaucracy

Structure

- 4.3.1 Objectives
- 4.3.2 Introduction
- 4.3.3 Concept of Power and Authority
- 4.3.4 Legitimate Authority (Legitimate Domination)
- 4.3.5 Types of Authority
- 4.3.6 Bureaucracy
- 4.3.7 Bureaucracy as the Ideal Type of Organization
- 4.3.8 Advantages of Bureaucracy
- 4.3.9 Limitations of Bureaucracy
- 4.3.10 Weber's Concept of the Iron Cage of Rationality
- 4.3.11 Contemporary Relevance of Bureaucracy
- 4.3.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.3.13 Keywords
- 4.3.14 Self-Assessment Questions

4.3.1 Objectives

On completing this lesson, you should be able to:

- distinguish between power and authority and define the concept of legitimate domination;
- state Weber's three ideal types of authority and their characteristics;
- explain the concept, features, and working of bureaucracy; and
- evaluate the advantages, limitations, and significance of bureaucracy in modern society.

4.3.2 Introduction

Max Weber's important contribution to sociology includes his discussion of authority and bureaucracy. Weber was interested in the reasons why people obey others and in the way complex organizations maintain order, coordination, and stability. All societies require some form of leadership and administration to perform collective tasks. Laws are enforced in governments, education is regulated in educational

institutions, production is managed in companies, and worship is coordinated in religious groups. These institutions can operate properly only if people accept their legitimate authorities.

Weber maintained that obedience is not based only on compulsion or coercion. Under normal conditions, people obey laws because they feel that those who have authority have a legitimate right to issue commands. The idea of legitimacy distinguishes authority from mere power. Different societies create different sources of legitimacy in accordance with their history, culture, religion, and political institutions. Therefore, Weber studied the sources of legitimate authority and classified it into three ideal types as given below: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority.

Connected to the concept of authority is Weber's concept of bureaucracy, which is the most effective form of organization for complex modern societies. As industrialization, urbanization, and economic specialization developed during the 19th and 20th centuries, more and more governments and organizations were forced to rely on rational-administrative organization. Bureaucracy became the best tool to coordinate large numbers of people using systematic rules, division of labour, and hierarchy.

Despite its efficiency, bureaucracy also has certain disadvantages: too much reliance on formal rules may lead to lack of flexibility, creative thinking and individual freedom. Weber's analysis of bureaucracy thus reveals both its effectiveness as an organizational principle and its implications for modern society.

In this lesson we will discuss the concepts of power, authority, legitimacy, and bureaucracy introduced by Weber. We will also study the advantages, disadvantages, and relevance of bureaucracy in the contemporary society in politics, administration, education, and business organizations.

4.3.3 Concept of Power and Authority

The concepts of power and authority are basic in political sociology and organizational studies. Though these concepts are often confused in everyday language, Weber distinguished them carefully.

Power: Weber called power (Macht) the probability that an individual or group can carry out their wishes despite possible opposition of others. Power means the ability of influencing the behaviour of other individuals irrespective of their willing submission to this influence.

Power may come from various sources: economic resources, political position, military power, physical strength, knowledge, professional competence, social status, or control over information. Power can be used in the forms of persuasion, rewards, sanctions, or coercion.

Power does not require legitimacy. An individual can make people obey through threats or force without being considered to have a legitimate right to command. Consequently, power can exist even in the absence of voluntary compliance.

Authority: Authority is a special form of power that is considered legitimate by those who obey it. According to Weber, authority exists if individuals obey commands due to belief in the legitimate right of commanding person.

Thus, authority implies two main aspects:

- a possibility of commanding; and
- belief in the legitimacy of these commands among the followers.

In contrast to coercive power, authority usually results in voluntary compliance because people recognize the legitimacy of authority. For instance, citizens obey judicial decisions because they recognize the authority of the judiciary. Students obey university rules because they accept the authority of educational institutions. Employees obey managerial decisions because organizational rules give legitimacy to the authority of managers. Therefore, authority ensures social stability through reducing the necessity of using continual coercion.

Difference between Power and Authority

As presented in table below, although closely related, power and authority differ in several important respects. This distinction forms the foundation of Weber's theory of legitimate authority.

Table 4.3.1 Difference between Power and Authority

Basis	Power	Authority
Meaning	Ability to influence or control others	Legitimate right to exercise power
Basis	Force, resources, influence, or coercion	Legitimacy and acceptance
Nature of obedience	May be unwilling or compelled	Generally voluntary

Stability	Often temporary	Comparatively stable
Need for legitimacy	Not essential	Essential

4.3.4 Legitimate Authority (Legitimate Domination)

Weber used the term legitimate domination (Herrschaft) in relation to cases when people obey commands due to belief in legitimacy of authority. Legitimacy is the recognition of legitimacy of an authority as proper, legal, or moral. The stability of any political and administrative system depends not only on its ability to use power but on its capacity to secure legitimacy. If people recognize legitimacy of authority, they obey the rules willingly, thus reducing the necessity of enforcing them using force continuously.

Legitimacy may have different sources. While some societies accept authority due to their ancient customs and traditions, others follow exceptional leaders who inspire personal devotion. Modern democratic states receive legitimacy based on legal norms. Different sources of legitimacy resulted in Weber's famous classification of authority.

4.3.5 Types of Authority

Weber distinguished three ideal types of legitimate authority:

1. Traditional Authority
2. Charismatic Authority
3. Rational-Legal Authority

These types correspond to different bases of accepting legitimacy of leadership. Actually, many political systems combine different types of authority.

4.3.5.1 Traditional Authority

Traditional authority is based on ancient customs, traditions, and social practices. People obey the commands of their leaders. Authority is perceived as part of the cultural heritage of the society and not according to the laws or personal achievements of the leader.

Traditional authority is typical of tribal societies, monarchies, feudalism, and patriarchal families. Leadership is usually hereditary and not achieved through personal merits or election. Succession takes place according to ancient customs, with the authority transferred to the

new generation. Examples are hereditary monarchs, tribal chiefs, village elders, and traditional religious leaders with their authority founded on tradition.

Characteristics of Traditional Authority

Traditional authority has the following unique features:

- legitimacy comes from ancient customs and traditions;
- leadership is hereditary;
- obedience is owed to a person who occupies a traditional position;
- administrative systems are informal and rely on personal loyalty;
- change is gradual due to the great value placed on traditions.

Merits

It offers stability and ensures the preservation of culture. Social unity is encouraged since it supports customary norms and established social values.

Limitations

Traditional authority may not favour innovation and progress. Leaders elected purely based on hereditary ties may not always be competent or efficient. Arbitrary decision-making is also possible because of the lack of legal procedures.

4.3.5.2 Charismatic Authority

Charismatic authority is based on unique personal characteristics of the individual leader. Individuals obey such leaders as they believe that he/she has exceptional powers, wisdom, courage, spirituality and vision. Unlike traditional authority, charisma is not inherited. It arises because of the individual's achievements and devotion of followers. Legitimacy of charismatic authority arises out of continuing faith in unique qualities of the individual.

Leaders possessing charismatic authority emerge during periods of political instability, economic crisis, social conflict and religious changes, at times when people lose confidence in established institutions. Such examples include charismatic political revolutionaries, religious reformers, military and social movement leaders who enjoy exceptional public loyalty.

Features of Charismatic Authority

The main features are:

- legitimacy based on unique characteristics;
- extremely emotional devotion on the part of followers;
- continuation of authority depends on public recognition;
- relatively informal organisational structure;
- indefinite succession after the death of leader.

Merits

Charismatic leaders may inspire social change, motivate public participation in politics and criticise existing social injustices. Charismatic leaders have launched many reform movements.

Limitations

As the basis of charisma is a particular individual, charisma is unstable. Charismatic movements tend to decline once that individual dies or loses public trust. Weber called it routinisation of charisma in which charismatic movements establish formal organisations.

4.3.5.3 Rational-Legal Authority

Rational-legal authority was considered by Weber as the typical form of authority in industrial society. Unlike in case of traditional and charismatic authorities, here legitimacy is derived from established laws and procedures. People obey not because of personal loyalty but because of the legitimacy of the office held by that individual. Thus, in rational-legal authority, authority is not in the person but in the office.

For example, people obey judges because of the legitimacy of the judicial office and not because of the personal characteristics of the judge. Other examples of individuals exercising rational-legal authority include civil servants, university administrators, police, government officials who administer the organisation based on formally established procedures.

Features of Rational-Legal Authority

The main features of rational-legal authority are the following:

- authority based on formally established laws and procedures;
- clearly defined duties of offices;
- appointments based on qualifications;

- decision-making follows established procedures;
- authority is impersonal not personal;
- obedience to the law and not individuals.

Rational-legal authority is the basis of bureaucratic administration considered by Weber to be the most efficient system of administration.

4.3.6 Bureaucracy

Among many contributions to the field of sociology made by Max Weber, his theory of bureaucracy stands out as one of the most influential in the study of public administration, organizational sociology, management and political science. Weber considered bureaucracy to be the most rational and efficient way of administering modern organisations. With increasing industrialisation and economic specialisation, traditional ways of administration based on personal and hereditary authorities became inefficient for modern organisations.

Weber uses the word 'bureaucracy' not in the common usage of the word, as a term meaning unnecessary administrative delays, but as the ideal type of organisation. Ideal type is a hypothetical model which brings to focus the essential features of an administrative system. Actual organisations might not fully match this ideal type but this ideal type helps to analyse the efficiency of administrative system. According to Weber, bureaucracy possesses certain characteristics including hierarchy, clearly defined duties, specialised functions, formal rules, appointment on merit and impersonality of decision making. These make it easy to organise large numbers of people in a systematic way.

Governments, universities, hospitals, banks, multinational corporations, military organisations and international organizations all possess certain elements of bureaucracy. Even though they might differ in their purposes, all these organisations share certain administrative principles.

4.3.6.1 Features of Bureaucracy

Max Weber described some important features which make a bureaucracy different from other organisations. Such features ensure efficiency, continuity and accountability of administrative systems.

(i) Specialisation of Work

Bureaucracy is based on a systematic division of labour. Each office is assigned specific duties and responsibilities. Employees are assigned

with specific jobs based on their qualifications. Specialisation increases efficiency because people get expertise in certain specific areas. It also eliminates duplication of effort and allows coordinated functioning of different departments.

For example, responsibilities in a university are classified into academic departments, examination departments, financial departments, admissions departments and administrative departments. All these departments function independently to achieve the objective of the university.

(ii) Hierarchy

Hierarchy is a characteristic feature of bureaucracy. Offices are arranged in a chain of command running from highest level to lowest level of authority. Every employee is responsible to his/her immediate superior officer. Higher authorities' co-ordinate and supervise the work of lower employees. This helps to maintain efficiency and accountability in the organisation.

(iii) Formal Rules and Regulations

Weber said that a bureaucratic organisation works in accordance with formal rules and regulations. These rules provide definition of duties of employees, procedures of decision-making, code of conduct and dispute settlement procedures. Formal rules ensure consistency in decision-making and reduce arbitrariness. In the presence of formal rules, same procedure is followed for similar cases thus making it more just and predictable.

(iv) Technical Competence and Merit-Based Recruitment

Appointments within a bureaucracy are made on the basis of technical qualifications, but not on the basis of personal ties, family connections, wealth or political patronage. Employees are recruited on the basis of objective criteria, including education, competitive examination, training and qualification. Promotion is also made according to merit, experience and performance.

A merit-based recruitment system enables organizations to recruit people having the knowledge and skills necessary for efficient administration. Also, this system encourages professionalism and avoids nepotism or favoritism.

(v) Impersonality

Impersonality is another distinctive feature of the bureaucratic administration according to Max Weber. Official decisions should be

made according to formal rules rather than personal feelings, emotions and preferences. Officials perform their duties impartially and treat all individuals equally in similar cases. Personal friendships, family connections, political ties or emotions should not play any role in making official decisions.

Impersonality contributes to equality and consistency while preventing discrimination and bias. People receive equal treatment since decisions are made according to legal procedures rather than according to personal preferences. However, it is argued that impersonality may be so extreme that it will make officials less human and insensitive.

(vi) Written Documents and Record Keeping

Bureaucratic organizations have systematic records in writing of decisions, policies, correspondence, financial transactions and other administrative activity. Documentation makes possible memory for the institution, accountability and possibility to verify decisions in future. This factor also guarantees continuity regardless of changes in personnel. Therefore, accurate record keeping is an important requirement of effective administration.

(vii) Full-Time Professional Officials

Bureaucratic positions are generally occupied by full-time professional officials who regard administration as a career. Officials spend their working time on organizational tasks and should be competent in terms of their technical qualifications. Professional employment leads to specialization, administrative experience and continuity of organizational life. It also creates possibilities for career advancement on merit and seniority.

(viii) Separation of Office from Personal Property

Official property in a bureaucracy belongs to the organization rather than to the individual office holder. Officials cannot treat organizational property as their own private property. Government money, organizational equipment, official automobiles, documents, office buildings belong to the organization regardless of changes in personnel. This factor prevents misuse of public property.

4.3.6.2 Principles Underlying Bureaucratic Administration

The above characteristics of bureaucracy reflect some general principles underlying bureaucratic administration.

Rationality

The bureaucratic administration is grounded on rational decision-making. Administrative decisions are guided by rational procedure, objective data and planning, rather than by personal preference or arbitrariness.

Predictability

As officials use standardized rules, similar cases are treated in a similar way. The predictability enables individuals to understand administrative procedures.

Efficiency

Specialization, division of labor and professional qualifications of administrators enable bureaucracies to perform complicated tasks effectively. Clear division of responsibilities eliminates confusion and improves coordination of different organizational units.

Continuity

Contrary to charismatic leadership, bureaucracy is not connected with particular individuals. Organizations are able to continue their functioning regardless of retirements and changes of leadership, as formal procedures do not change.

Accountability

The hierarchical organization guarantees that every official is responsible to his superior. Decisions are able to be verified, revised or appealed.

4.3.7 Bureaucracy as the Ideal Type of Organization

Bureaucracy is considered by Weber as the ideal type of rational organization, since it combines technical efficiency with administrative continuity. He believes that never before any administrative system reached such precision, speed, consistency and predictability as bureaucracy did. There are several reasons why bureaucracy became predominant in modern societies.

First, industrialization increased size and complexity of organizations. Factories, governments, educational establishments, hospitals, businesses needed special systems of administration capable to coordinate many employees. Second, development of democracy and rule of law necessitated

impartial administration. Decisions based on legal rules instead of personal favoritism created citizens' trust in governmental institutions.

Third, development of technology and economy necessitated more and more specialization. Merit-based recruitment enabled organizations to employ technically competent professionals capable to perform complicated administrative functions. Finally, bureaucracy provided continuity of organizational operation. As the authority was attached to offices, not to individuals, organizations were able to work efficiently in spite of any changes in leadership.

That is why Weber regards bureaucracy as the characteristic form of organization in modern industrial society. At the same time, Weber understands that too much bureaucratization may create new social problems, which is discussed in the next section dedicated to the limitations of bureaucracy and iron cage of rationality.

4.3.8 Advantages of Bureaucracy

Weber considers bureaucracy as the most efficient and rational form of organization for conducting large and complex institutions. Comparing with traditional or charismatic forms of administration, bureaucracy has several advantages that provide organizational effectiveness and social stability.

Efficiency and Specialization

The division of labor in bureaucracy enables employees to specialize in particular tasks according to their qualifications and expertise. With repetition of particular functions, people become more competent and productive. Specialization prevents duplication of tasks and improves efficiency of the organization.

Predictability and Consistency

As there exist formal rules and standardized procedures, similar cases are treated in a similar way. Administrative decisions become more consistent and prevent uncertainty. Citizens and employees are able to predict administrative procedures as decisions are made according to established regulations, but not according to personal preferences.

Merit-Based Administration

Appointments and promotions in bureaucracy are based on technical qualifications, educational qualifications and professional experience.

Merit-based recruitment promotes efficiency, professionalism and accountability while preventing nepotism, favoritism and political patronage.

Accountability

Hierarchical structure of bureaucracy makes clear the relations of authority and responsibility. Every official is responsible to his superior, what makes easy supervision of work, revision of decisions and correction of mistakes. It improves discipline in organization.

Continuity and Stability

Bureaucratic organizations are able to work effectively regardless of retirements, resignations or replacements of employees. As the authority is attached to offices, and not to individuals, administrative activities remain stable in spite of changes in personnel and leadership.

Impartiality

Impersonality makes sure that decisions are made according to rules, but not according to personal relations or emotions. Equal treatment of people in similar cases promotes fairness and citizens' trust in administrative institutions.

4.3.9 Limitations of Bureaucracy

Though Weber believed that bureaucracy was superior to other forms of administration from the standpoint of efficiency and rationality, he also understood that extreme bureaucracy might lead to a number of disadvantages. Sociologists and organizational theorists that followed him outlined some more of these limitations.

Formalism

Adherence to formal rules and procedures may decrease flexibility of organizational decision-making. Organizational officials may be unwilling to adjust their activities in response to changes in external conditions when such adjustments are required. In result, an organization may react slow to new challenges.

Excessive Formalism

Another limitation is connected with high formality of bureaucratic organizations that pay much attention to documentation, formal

procedures and regulations. Though formal rules increase accountability of organizations, they may also lead to delays in decision-making and make the process less efficient.

Goal Displacement

One of the major problems associated with bureaucracy is goal displacement. This idea was developed by sociologist Robert K. Merton. An employee of a bureaucratic organization tends to focus on rules of organization rather than on the goals that these rules help to achieve. Thus, rules are ends in themselves, not means to achieve organizational goals.

Lack of Innovativeness

High degree of regulation of organizational processes may discourage employees from creative actions and innovations. Employees may become too bound by rules and may be unwilling to experiment and find alternative approaches to solving organizational problems.

Impersonal Relations

Though impersonality increases objectivity of organizational decision-making, it may also decrease sensitivity of an organization to the specifics of each case. An official may treat each person as a case, not as a human being. Such approach may create dissatisfactory working atmosphere and discontent among population.

Concentration of Power

Despite the fact that bureaucracy distributes responsibilities in an effective way, decision-making authority may get concentrated at high administrative levels. Low-level employees may have very few chances to participate in organizational decision-making.

4.3.10 Concept of Iron Cage of Rationality by Weber

One of the most important achievements of Weber was his analysis of long-term consequences of growing rationalization of society. According to Weber, rationalization may result in loss of personal freedom and independence of individuals in modern bureaucratic society. The Weber used a special concept to describe such situation. It was called iron cage (stahlhartes Gehäuse).

Iron Cage is a term used to describe a situation when individuals are locked in highly rationalized systems where all actions are controlled by

formal rules, regulations, technical procedures and bureaucracy. Individuals lose independence because they have to submit to all organizational procedures and routines rather than use their own judgment.

According to Weber, bureaucracy is based on rational principles that increase efficiency and predictability of organizations. But at the same time, they limit possibilities of individuals to be creative, spontaneous and independent. Employees of an organization tend to become specialized and perform narrow tasks in highly rationalized organizational structure. Their actions are guided by organizational rules rather than personal judgment.

Weber feared that modern organizations would substitute personal relations by formal administration and individuals would start to rely on bureaucratic institutions in matters like education, job seeking, treatment in hospitals, taxes, bank account and other public services. Expansion of bureaucracy reduces opportunities for independent decisions.

Therefore, Iron Cage is a paradox of modern society. It means that although rationalization has led to unprecedented development of science, economy and efficient administration, it has created systems that limit personal freedom and independence.

Examples of modern Iron Cages are highly standardized management systems in corporations, algorithms of evaluation of employees' performance, digital monitoring of people in workplaces, automation of administrative processes and regulations of public institutions. They all increase efficiency of organizations but raise questions of people's privacy, creativity and independence.

Weber did not suggest to abandon bureaucracy. At the same time, he wanted to warn societies about possible consequences of bureaucratization. Iron Cage became a source of discussions about proper combination of efficiency of administration and freedom of individuals.

4.3.11 Contemporaries Relevance of Bureaucracy

More than a hundred years since Max Weber developed his theory, bureaucracy is still the dominating organizational type worldwide. Governments, universities, multinational corporations, banks, hospitals, armed forces and international organizations are using such bureaucratic principles as hierarchical system, specialization, formal rules and recruiting on the basis of merit.

In democratic societies bureaucracy is necessary to implement public policies, ensure continuity of administration and apply laws impartially. Civil service in democracies works according to legal procedures that are similar to those described by Weber as rational-legal authority.

Development of information technologies has changed many features of bureaucracy. E-governance, digital document management, online services and artificial intelligence have made the administration more efficient and less dependent on paperwork. But these technologies have not eliminated bureaucracy but only created digital bureaucracies.

Private organizations of large scale also rely on bureaucracy for coordination of production, finance management, human resource management, quality control and customer services. Even flexible organizations possess features of bureaucracy as listed below:

Clear distribution of responsibilities, accountability mechanisms and formal procedures.

Organizations try to compensate for deficiencies of bureaucracy by promoting teamwork, decentralization, innovativeness, participative decision-making and flexibility. Therefore, contemporary management tries to combine efficiency of Weberian administration with adaptability to social and technological changes.

But despite the changing nature of organizations, Weber's analysis provides one of the most detailed theoretical frameworks for study of authority, administration and organizational behavior. His concepts still play an important role in sociology, political science, public administration, organizational studies and management.

4.3.12 Let us sum up

Max Weber distinguished between concepts of power and authority saying that authority is the legitimate power which is accepted by those who submit to it. Stability of social and political institutions depends on legitimacy, not only on coercion. On the basis of legitimacy, Weber suggested to distinguish three types of authority: traditional authority, charismatic authority and rational-legal authority. These types differ in sources of legitimacy, style of leadership and administration.

Weber considered rational-legal authority as the main characteristic of modern society and the basis of bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is an ideal type of organization characterized by hierarchical structure, division of

labor, formal rules, technical expertise, recruiting on the basis of merit, impersonality, documentation and professional administration. All these features allow efficient and predictable functioning of organizations.

Despite numerous advantages of bureaucracy (efficiency, accountability, impartiality, continuity), this organizational type has some limitations as well. Formalism, rigidity, goal displacement and impersonality of relationships may decrease flexibility of organizations. Weber's concept of Iron Cage of Rationality emphasizes the possibility of limiting personal freedom in highly rationalized organizational systems. But despite all these limitations, bureaucracy is the prevailing type of organization in modern society. Governments, educational institutions, corporations, healthcare organizations and international organizations still run their activities largely based on the Weberian approach. The theory is thus among the greatest theories that have been made for organizational studies.

4.3.13 Keywords

Legitimate Authority, Traditional Authority, Charismatic Authority, Rational-Legal Authority, Bureaucracy, Hierarchy, Iron Cage.

4.3.14 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Distinguish between power and authority. Why did Weber consider legitimacy to be the foundation of authority?
2. Explain Weber's three ideal types of authority. How do they differ in terms of their basis of legitimacy?
3. Define bureaucracy and discuss its major characteristics according to Max Weber.
4. Critically examine the advantages and limitations of bureaucracy. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples.
5. Explain Weber's concept of the **Iron Cage of Rationality**. Discuss its relevance in understanding contemporary organizations and public administration.

Lesson 4.4 - World Religions and Western Capitalism

Structure

- 4.4.1 Objectives
- 4.4.2 Introduction
- 4.4.3 Weber's Sociology of Religion
- 4.4.4 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
- 4.4.5 Weber's Comparative Study of World Religions
- 4.4.6 Why Did Modern Capitalism Develop First in the West?
- 4.4.7 Criticisms of Weber's Thesis
- 4.4.8 Contemporary Relevance of Weber's Sociology of Religion
- 4.4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.4.10 Keywords
- 4.4.11 Self-Assessment Questions

4.4.1 Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe Weber's sociological approach to studying religion;
- examine the relationship between religion and economic activity from the point of perspective of Weber's works;
- present the main arguments put forward in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism;
- compare the observations Weber made about world religions; and
- critically assess Weber's explanation of the origin of Western capitalism.

4.4.2 Introduction

The term religion implies the system of beliefs, rituals, and values related to the sacred sphere. But, unlike traditional sociologists, the classics saw religion not only as an individual faith but also as a powerful social institution that affects human behavior, social structure, and historical processes. One of the most original approaches to the relationship between religion and economic activity was presented by Max Weber.

While denying the exclusively economic interpretation of social change, Weber claimed that the ideas, beliefs, and values could also have such a historical effect. He tried to answer the question about why modern industrial capitalism appeared in Western Europe rather than in other ancient cultures such as India or China with their rich history, culture, and trade relations. And his answer was that certain ideas encouraged the behavior favorable for the capitalist business.

Weber's best-known book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) deals with the specific contribution of the Protestant religious values to the appearance of modern capitalism. In this work Weber did not say that Protestantism gave rise to capitalism in its entirety and did not ignore the economic, political, and technological factors. But he explained that the religious ethics created the environment conducive to disciplined work, rational organization, saving, investment, and economic growth.

To prove this idea, Weber conducted a comparative study of several world religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, and Christianity. Analyzing their ethical doctrines and attitude towards work, wealth, authorities, and everyday life, he tried to explain the different paths of economic development taken by different civilizations.

This lesson discusses Weber's sociology of religion, his famous thesis about the Protestant ethic, the comparative study of world religions, and his explanation of the origin of Western capitalism. Some criticism and enduring relevance of these ideas are also discussed.

4.4.3 Weber's Sociology of Religion

Max Weber considered religion as a sociologist rather than a theologian. His purpose was not to find out whether religious beliefs are true or false but to understand how they affected social action and historical process. According to Weber, religion represents an important source of values that guide individual behavior and shape social institutions.

Unlike Karl Marx, who saw religion as an instrument that justified economic inequality, Weber saw religion as a powerful social force that could influence economic, political, and cultural processes. Likewise, whereas Émile Durkheim emphasized the role of religion in the promotion of social solidarity and collective consciousness, Weber focused on its influence on individual motivations and social action.

Weber believed that religious beliefs shape people's attitude towards work, wealth, consumption, authorities, education, and everyday behavior. Such attitude, when held by many people, may eventually affect broader economic and social patterns.

Therefore, religion represents the system of meanings that help individuals interpret their life and organize their actions. Religious traditions differ in their ethical orientation that results in various economic behavior and social development of different civilizations.

Religion and Social Action

Weber's analysis of religion is closely connected to his theory of social action. Religious values provide people with motives for action and shape their choice in everyday life. For instance, religion which stresses the virtues of discipline, punctuality, honesty, and hard work promotes behaviors conducive to economic productivity. On the contrary, religious traditions that preach the renunciation of the worldly matters promote the lifestyles unrelated to business or industrial activities.

According to Weber, such religious motivations operate through the subjective meanings attached to their actions by believers. People work, save, consume, and invest not because of the necessity but also because of their religious beliefs that define these activities as moral. Thus, religion indirectly affects society by shaping the values guiding individual actions.

Religion and Social Change

One of the most important ideas of Weber is his explanation of the way how religion can become an agent of social change. Previous theories regarded social change as caused primarily by economic or technological changes. Weber agreed on the importance of these factors but emphasized that ideas also have transformative power. Religious beliefs could change people's attitude towards work, authorities, education, and economic activity and thus contribute to the long-term institutional change.

His explanation of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism demonstrates this more general idea. Changes in religious ethics gradually shaped patterns of social action that in their turn affected economic institutions. Therefore, Weber challenged the explanation of history as the process driven solely by material or economic factors. Instead, he showed how cultural ideas and religious values could become important causes of social change.

4.4.4 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Published in 1905, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is Weber's most popular work and one of the most influential books in sociology. The key question raised in this study is: Why modern capitalism arose first in Western Europe rather than in other developed civilizations?

Weber noticed that capitalism existed in one form or another in the history. Merchants, traders, and commerce were common in ancient India, China, Middle East, and Roman Empire. However, modern capitalism represented something different. It included rational organization, accounting, disciplined labor, technological innovations, investments, and reinvestments of the profits.

Weber maintained that the appearance of the new type of capitalism was connected with some ethical values existing within the Protestant branch of Christianity, especially Calvinism. It should be noted that Weber did not state that Protestantism was the only factor behind capitalism. He maintained that the ethical values typical of Protestantism helped create a conducive cultural environment for capitalist economic activity to develop.

The "Spirit of Capitalism"

The "spirit of capitalism" does not mean the desire to earn money. Many cultures in history tried to acquire money and wealth. Weber argues that the spirit of capitalism is a special ethical attitude towards economic activity.

The spirit of capitalism includes:

- disciplined and organized work;
- punctuality;
- honesty in business;
- systematic organization of production;
- bookkeeping;
- reinvesting the profit;
- not spending money on unnecessary luxury; and
- treating work as a moral duty rather than as an economic activity.

Thus, capitalism became a particular way of life along with being an economic system. It became a way of life organized in a rational manner and based on discipline and self-restraint.

The Protestant Ethic

Weber maintained that these capitalist values were strengthened by the ethical teaching of certain Protestant denominations appeared in the period of the Reformation. The Protestant ethic includes:

- diligence in the chosen occupation;
- being responsible for oneself;
- honesty;
- self-discipline;
- frugality;
- the lack of wasteful expenditure; and
- devotion to productive work.

This ethic encourages people to pursue economic success in a disciplined manner.

Unlike in traditional societies, where the earned money was usually spent on luxury and show, in the case of Protestant ethic people were supposed to save money and to reinvest it. Thus, the lifestyle typical of Protestantism promoted capital accumulation and economic expansion.

The Concept of “Calling”

One of the main concepts introduced by Weber is the Protestant concept of calling (Beruf). According to the theology of Protestants, everyone has a God-given vocation or calling. The usual occupations – whether farming, business, teaching, administration, or craft – were considered to be morally valuable activities aimed at serving God.

As a result, work received its religious value. The economic success achieved through diligent and honest work was interpreted as fulfillment of one’s divine calling. Thus, through the theological approach productive work was transformed into a moral duty.

Calvinism and Predestination

Weber especially paid attention to Calvinism as one of the most important denominations of Protestant Christianity. Calvinist theology is focused on the idea of predestination, which presupposes that God had already decided whom to save. As a person cannot influence God’s decision, believers felt uncertainty about their spiritual destiny.

According to Weber, many Calvinists wanted to find signs that they belong to the group of the saved. Although material success does not

ensure salvation, diligent work, good behavior and economic success can become such signs. As a result, believers led a lifestyle characterized by diligent work, punctuality, frugality and continuous productive activity.

Asceticism

Another important element of Weber's analysis is worldly asceticism. The term "asceticism" means self-discipline, self-control, and the absence of unnecessary pleasure. In contrast to monks, who withdraw themselves from the social life, the ascetics of Protestants remain actively involved in economic affairs but lead a moderate and simple life.

Instead of spending the earned money on luxury and entertainment, people are encouraged to save their profit and reinvest it. This behavior promoted capital accumulation, business expansion and long-term economic growth. According to Weber, this combination of diligent work and frugal consumption became one of the cultural foundations of modern capitalism.

4.4.5 Weber's Comparative Study of World Religions

To support his thesis about the connection between religion and economic development, Weber did not limit his analysis to Christianity alone. He carried out a comparative study of some world religions, such as Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. His goal was to understand how the religious beliefs and ethical systems influenced the social action and economic behavior.

Weber did not try to estimate the superiority of one religion compared with another. He analyzed how every religion influenced the attitudes towards work, wealth, power, and daily life. Through the comparison of various civilizations, he tried to explain why the rational capitalism arose in Western Europe but not in other civilizations that had equally rich cultural traditions.

(i) Confucianism

Confucianism is the teaching of Confucius, which developed in China. This religion is based on moral behavior, education, social harmony, respect to authorities, and family relations. Weber states that Confucian ethic encourages people to keep social order and to adapt to the existing institutions rather than to transform them.

Confucianism appreciates education, self-discipline and administrative abilities, which led to the formation of a highly efficient civil service. However, Weber states that it does not encourage systematic pursuit of profit and continuous reinvestment of money typical of modern capitalism. The orientation on the maintenance of social harmony and preservation of social relations inhibits economic dynamism typical of capitalism.

(ii) Hinduism

Weber considers Hinduism one of the most influential religions influencing the Indian civilization. He states that certain aspects of the Hindu social organization, especially the caste system, influence economic mobility and flexibility of occupation.

The caste system historically tied occupations to the hereditary status of people and limited possibilities of the occupational mobility. Weber believes that such social organization does not help in the development of the free labor market and rational organization of economic activity typical of modern capitalism.

Also, he states that such Hindu religious ideas as karma, dharma, and moksha encourage people to fulfill their social duties and to obtain spiritual liberation. These ideas encourage moral responsibility and social stability but do not create disciplined economic ethic typical of Protestantism.

It should be noted that many contemporary scholars consider Weber's analysis of Hinduism to be too superficial. They argue that he underestimated the diversity of Hindu traditions and did not pay enough attention to the commercial activities that took place in different periods of Indian history.

(iii) Buddhism

Buddhism is based on ethical behavior, compassion, self-discipline, and spiritual liberation from sufferings through elimination of desires. Weber notes that the Buddhism puts much emphasis on the spiritual development and detachment from the worldly matters.

According to his analysis, such orientation encouraged people to achieve their spiritual liberation but not to transform economic life. Therefore, Buddhism did not encourage the continuous accumulation and reinvesting of money that Weber associates with capitalist development. However, Weber recognizes that Buddhism made a big contribution to moral discipline, education and social organization in Asian societies.

(iv) Judaism

Judaism held a unique position in Weber's comparative analysis since he thought that some features of the religious tradition of Judaism helped the formation of rational ethics.

Heads of the Hebrew prophets emphasized moral responsibility, ethical monotheism, discipline and obedience to divine laws. Weber believed that all these things were later reflected in Christianity and Protestantism. In this way, Judaism served as one of the links in the chain of religious ethics which in turn influenced Western civilization.

(v) Islam

Weber considered Islam with its features of monotheism, community solidarity, justice and ethical behavior. He noted that Islamic civilization made significant progress in trade, science and city-building in the medieval epoch.

However, according to Weber, political organization, military structure and patrimonial authority prevented the development of rational legal system and bureaucracy required for modern capitalism. Similarly, to Weber's analyses of other religions, this point is also discussed by later researchers, who note diversity and economic dynamism of Islamic societies.

4.4.6 Why Did Modern Capitalism Develop First in the West?

The key aim of Weber's comparative analysis was to provide an answer to the question about the reasons for the appearance of Western rational capitalism.

According to Weber, capitalism did not appear simply because Europeans wanted money. Commercial activity was widespread in Asia, Middle East and other parts of the world centuries before the rise of capitalism in Europe. However, European capitalism was characterized by systematic, rational and organized nature.

There were several causes for its appearance.

Protestant religious ethics

The Protestant ethics encouraged work discipline, honesty, economy, punctuality and reinvestment of money. All these qualities led to economic productivity and capital accumulation.

Rational organization

In Western societies economic activities were organized systematically through accounting, legal contracts, standardized administration and bureaucracy. It increased efficiency of economic activities.

Rational-legal authority

Development of rational-legal authority gave stability to the legal system, security of property rights and reliable administration. It encouraged long-term investments and commercial development.

Scientific and technological development

Scientific and technological progress increased productivity and provided conditions for industrialization. Rational scientific approach was consistent with the ethics of hard-working, encouraged by Protestantism.

Urbanization and commercial expansion

Development of cities, markets, banking system and international trade provided conditions for entrepreneurial activity and industrialization.

Therefore, according to Weber, modern capitalism appeared as a result of the interplay of various factors such as religion, law, politics, economy and culture.

4.4.7 Criticisms of Weber's Thesis

Even though Weber's sociology still remains one of the most influential works in this field, his thesis about the reasons of capitalism is widely criticized. One of the most serious criticisms comes from Marxist scholars. They think that Weber overestimated the role of religion while undervaluing the significance of economic factors, classes, colonial expansion and technological progress. According to the Marxist approach, capitalism appeared due to materialistic reasons.

Historians criticize Weber in regard to capitalist trade and enterprises which appeared long before Protestant Reformation. For example, Italian city-states like Venice and Florence had thriving capitalism during the medieval epoch, proving that Protestantism cannot fully explain the origin of capitalism.

The interpretation of the religions of Asia is also criticized. There are numerous opinions about the support of numerous commercial activities

by Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam. It is argued that Weber made some generalizations which overlooked the regional differences.

Another criticism concerns colonialism. Some researchers believe that the development of the European economy was significantly influenced by overseas expansion, colonial exploitation, international trade and natural resources, which were not paid enough attention in Weber's analysis. However, Weber never claimed that religion was the only reason of capitalism. His main thesis consisted in the fact that religious values were one of the key cultural factors among others affecting the historical development.

4.4.8 Contemporary Relevance of Weber's Sociology of Religion

More than a hundred years after the publication of 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism', Weber's sociology of religion still remains influential in the researches in sociology, economics, political science, history and development studies. Even though the social and economic conditions of the twenty-first century are much different from those of Weber, many of his thoughts are still relevant to the understanding of the connection between culture, religion and economic behavior.

One of the most significant contributions of Weber is the idea that economic development cannot be explained only through the material factors. Nowadays sociologists understand that values, beliefs, education, trust, work ethics and institutional culture affect the patterns of economic development together with technology, natural resources and political system. Therefore, Weber's sociology contributed to the expansion of the study of development.

His sociology stimulated the studies of civilizations' comparison. Sociologists investigate how different cultural traditions influence entrepreneurship, organizational behavior, education, gender relations, political participation and public administration. Contrary to the approach which presupposes that all societies develop along the same lines, Weber's method emphasizes the importance of the historical and cultural diversity.

The analysis of the rationalization by Weber remains significant too. Modern organizations pay much attention to efficiency, specialization, planning and performance evaluation. Governments, corporations, universities, hospitals and financial institutions use systematic approaches and bureaucratic administration that corresponds to Weber's general theory of the rationalization. Digital technologies, artificial intelligence and

algorithmic decisions have increased the sphere of rational organization even more, and therefore Weber's ideas remain topical for the modern society.

The relationship between religion and public sphere remains interesting for scholars too. Religious values still affect voting behavior, educational systems, charitable organizations, environmental movement, business ethics and social reforms in many countries. The approach of Weber stimulates sociologists to consider all these effects without reduction of religion to the economic or purely spiritual explanations.

Finally, Weber's sociology remains methodologically valuable since it shows the advantages of the combination of historical, comparative and interpretative approaches. His interdisciplinary approach remains inspiring for the social sciences' researches.

4.4.9 Let us sum up

Max Weber considered religion to be an important social institution that could influence patterns of social actions and historical development. In contrast to the explanations that explained social changes only by economic factors, Weber believed that religious beliefs and ethics could influence individual behavior and contribute to institutional transformation.

According to Max Weber, certain Protestant values, such as disciplined work, thrift, self-restraint, honesty, and the idea of calling made a suitable cultural climate for the emergence of rational capitalism. He never claimed that religion was the only cause of capitalism and believed that the ethical teachings of religion influenced the economic, legal and political environment making it favorable for capitalist development.

Weber supported his theory by conducting comparative research of Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam and analyzing the ethical norms and attitudes toward work, property, authority, and daily life of these religions in order to reveal why different civilizations developed differently. Many aspects of his interpretation have been criticized and refuted, yet his comparative sociological approach is among the most significant contributions to sociological science.

Regardless of numerous objections related to his understanding of non-Western religions and to the genesis of capitalism, the sociology of religion of Weber remains extremely actual in the contemporary society. It shows that the process of social change is a result of interconnection of economic, political, cultural, and religious processes and not a consequence of any of

them separately. Thus, his ideas continue to guide modern sociologists in their studies of development, organizations, public administration, economic sociology and comparative civilizations.

4.4.10 Keywords

Protestant Ethic, Spirit of Capitalism, Calvinism, Predestination, Asceticism, Rational Capitalism, Rationalization.

4.4.11 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Describe Max Weber's sociological approach to the study of religion. In what way does it differ from the theories of Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim?
2. State the main ideas of Weber presented in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
3. Explain the notions of calling, predestination, and worldly asceticism. In what way do they correlate with the development of capitalism?
4. Compare Weber's remarks about Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. What differences between these religions influenced their impact on economy?
5. Evaluate critically the sociological theory of Weber regarding the origin of Western capitalism. What are its main flaws?

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UNIT – V

Comparing Marx, Weber and Durkheim

Introduction

Works by Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber constitute the basis of classical sociology. Despite the fact that all sociologists tried to explain the nature of society and social change, they approached the issue from different theoretical and methodological positions. In particular, Marx concentrated on economic structures and class struggle, Durkheim – on social facts, social integration, and collective existence; and Weber on social action, subjective meaning, and impact of ideas and culture. Their theories have greatly influenced the development of sociology.

This unit uses comparative approach in the analysis of similarities and differences of the three classical sociologists. Unlike other units devoted to their theories, this one will consider how these sociologists differed in methodological approaches and views on religion and capitalism. The analysis of their perspectives will help learners to understand better the diversity of sociological thought and use various theoretical approaches for the analysis of the same social phenomenon.

Objectives

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

- compare the methodological approaches of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim.
- explain similarities and differences of Durkheim's and Weber's perspectives on religion.
- compare Marx's and Weber's interpretations of capitalism.
- critically evaluate advantages and disadvantages of the classical sociological perspectives.

Lessons in this Unit

Lesson 5.1 Methodology: Marx, Weber and Durkheim

Lesson 5.2 Religion: Durkheim and Weber

Lesson 5.3 Capitalism: Marx and Weber

Lesson 5.1 - Methodology: Marx, Weber and Durkheim

Structure

- 5.1.1 Objectives
- 5.1.2 Introduction
- 5.1.3 Why Compare Sociological Methodologies?
- 5.1.4 Marx's Methodological Orientation
- 5.1.5 Weber's Methodological Orientation
- 5.1.6 Durkheim's Methodological Orientation
- 5.1.7 Comparative Analysis of Marx, Weber and Durkheim
- 5.1.8 Strengths and Limitations of the Three Approaches
- 5.1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.1.10 Keywords
- 5.1.11 Self-Assessment Questions

5.1.1 Objectives

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

- compare the methodological approaches of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.
- distinguish the major similarities and differences among the three sociologists.
- evaluate the strengths and limitations of their methodological perspectives.

5.1.2 Introduction

The study of society requires appropriate methods for understanding social reality. Although Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim shared the common objective of establishing sociology as a scientific discipline, they differed considerably in the methods they employed to explain social phenomena. Their methodological perspectives reflect distinct assumptions about the nature of society, the relationship between individuals and social structures, and the factors responsible for social change.

Marx adopted a materialist and historical approach that emphasized economic structures and class relations. Durkheim argued that sociology

should investigate objective social facts using scientific methods similar to those employed in the natural sciences. Weber, in contrast, believed that sociology must understand the meanings individuals attach to their actions through an interpretive approach. A comparison of these methodological orientations demonstrates that sociology developed through multiple intellectual traditions rather than a single unified perspective.

5.1.3 Why Compare Sociological Methodologies?

Methodology is a set of principles, assumptions, and procedures used to investigate social phenomena and produce sociological knowledge. Methodology includes approaches to collecting data, interpreting social reality, and explaining patterns of human behavior. The complexity and dynamics of society require the application of different methodological approaches because sociologists' understanding of society, human behavior and causes of social change varies.

The methodological approaches of Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber constitute the three basic methodological traditions in classical sociology. Although all these sociologists aimed to found sociology as science, they were different in their assumptions about the subject of sociology, nature of social reality, and appropriate methods of its study. As a result, these differences resulted in the formation of distinct theories that continue influencing sociological research.

There are several reasons why it is important to compare these methodologies. First, it allows learners to realize that sociology is a pluralistic discipline that contains various perspectives rather than one generally accepted method of analysis. Each classical sociologist had his own approach to society and, thus, focused on different aspects of social life. Comparative approach helps to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

Second, the methodological comparison proves that many social phenomena can be explained in different ways. For example, the appearance of capitalism can be explained by Marx as the result of changes in economic structure and class relations; however, Weber attributes it to the influence of religious ideas, rationalization and culture. At the same time, although Durkheim explains social order in terms of shared norms and collective consciousness, Weber emphasizes individual actions and Marx explains it by means of economic structure and class domination.

Third, the understanding of methodological differences helps sociologists to choose the approach suitable for empirical research. Researches related to economic inequality and class relations usually rely on Marxian approaches, whereas researches concerning social integration, education, crime, and institutions often use Durkheim's focus on social facts. The investigations of individual behavior, organizational culture, leadership, and religion often rely on Weber's interpretative approach. Methodology, thus, plays an important role in sociological investigation.

Finally, methodological comparison promotes critical thinking. Learners do not accept one explanation of social phenomena, evaluate different approaches, and understand their assumptions and limitations. This comparative approach expands the scope of sociological analysis and provides a comprehensive understanding of society.

Thus, the methodologies of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim should be viewed as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Each of these methodologies gives valuable information about different aspects of social life and, thus, provides rich intellectual background for understanding of society, its institutions, and social change.

5.1.4 Marx's Methodological Approach

Karl Marx created methodological approach that is based on historical materialism. According to this theory, the organization of production affects social institutions, political system, law, and dominant ideas. Society, thus, cannot be investigated without taking into account its economic base.

History is a dynamic process that is driven by contradictions of the mode of production. Every society contains two classes with opposite interests that cause social tensions and, finally, structural transformation. This dialectic process explains the transition from one historical period to another, for example, from feudalism to capitalism and then to socialism. Unlike other sociologists, who considered society as something stable, Marx considered conflict to be the main driving force of the historical development.

Another feature of Marx's methodology is its emphasis on structural approach. Human behavior is explained mainly in connection with social and economic structures. The ideas, values, and opportunities of people are affected by their place in the system of production. Therefore, according

to Marx, sociological analysis must focus on objective social conditions rather than on isolated actions of people.

Moreover, Marxism assumes that sociology should not only describe society but also analyze existing inequalities and promote social transformation. Thus, his methodology includes scientific investigation and critical analysis of social institutions. Sociology could help to create more just society through the exposure of mechanisms of exploitation and domination. Despite criticism of Marx's methodological approach for its focus on economic factors, it remains highly influential in the studies of class inequality, labor relations, political economy, globalization, and social conflicts.

5.1.5 Weber's Methodological Orientation

Max Weber developed a methodological approach that differed significantly from that of both Marx and Durkheim. While he acknowledged the importance of social structures, Weber argued that sociology should primarily seek to understand the meanings individuals attach to their actions. He defined sociology as a science that interprets social action and explains its causes and consequences. This interpretive approach, known as *Verstehen* (understanding), places human intentions, motives, and values at the centre of sociological analysis.

Unlike Marx, who emphasized economic structures, Weber rejected the idea that a single factor could explain all social phenomena. He argued that social life is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including economic interests, religious beliefs, political institutions, cultural traditions, and historical circumstances. This perspective, often referred to as multicausal analysis, enables sociologists to examine society from a broader and more balanced viewpoint.

Another important methodological contribution of Weber is the concept of the ideal type. An ideal type is an analytical construct developed by the researcher to highlight the essential characteristics of a social phenomenon. It does not represent reality exactly but serves as a conceptual model against which actual social situations can be compared. Weber used ideal types to analyse bureaucracy, authority, capitalism, and other social institutions in a systematic manner.

Weber also emphasized the principle of value neutrality in sociological research. He argued that researchers inevitably choose topics based on personal interests or societal concerns, but once the investigation begins,

they must conduct their research objectively. Personal beliefs, political commitments, and moral judgments should not influence the collection, interpretation, or presentation of evidence. This distinction between personal values and scientific inquiry remains a fundamental principle of modern social research.

Weber viewed society as the outcome of meaningful interactions among individuals. Social institutions emerge, develop, and change because people act according to their beliefs, goals, and interpretations of the social world. Consequently, sociology must explain both the subjective meanings of human action and the broader patterns that arise from these actions.

Weber's methodological orientation has had a lasting influence on sociology and the social sciences. His interpretive approach has shaped qualitative research methods, organizational studies, political sociology, sociology of religion, and cultural analysis. By combining objective analysis with an understanding of subjective meanings, Weber expanded the scope of sociological inquiry beyond purely structural explanations.

5.1.6 Durkheim's Methodological Orientation

Émile Durkheim sought to establish sociology as an independent scientific discipline by developing a rigorous and objective methodology for studying society. He argued that sociology should investigate social facts, which are patterns of behaviour, beliefs, values, and institutions that exist outside individuals and exert a coercive influence upon them. According to Durkheim, these social facts constitute the proper subject matter of sociology and should be studied objectively, just as natural scientists study physical phenomena.

Durkheim maintained that sociologists must treat social facts as "things," meaning they should be observed impartially without relying on personal opinions or subjective interpretations. Social phenomena should be explained using empirical evidence, systematic observation, and comparative analysis rather than speculation or philosophical reasoning. This emphasis on objectivity reflects Durkheim's commitment to a positivist scientific approach.

A distinctive feature of Durkheim's methodology is his insistence that social facts should be explained by other social facts. Individual psychology or personal motives cannot adequately explain collective phenomena such as religion, law, education, or crime. Instead, these institutions must be understood in relation to the wider social environment, including norms,

values, and patterns of social organization. This approach underscores the autonomy of sociology as a discipline separate from psychology and philosophy.

Durkheim also adopted a functional perspective in explaining social institutions. He believed that social phenomena persist because they perform important functions that contribute to social order and stability. Institutions such as religion, education, family, and law help maintain social integration by reinforcing shared values and regulating individual behaviour. Even phenomena such as crime, which appear harmful, may serve certain social functions by clarifying moral boundaries and promoting social cohesion.

Another important characteristic of Durkheim's methodology is the use of comparative and statistical methods. His study of suicide demonstrated that seemingly personal acts could be explained by social factors such as integration and regulation. By analysing statistical data across different societies and social groups, Durkheim showed that objective scientific methods could reveal underlying social patterns.

Durkheim's methodological orientation laid the foundation for empirical sociology and greatly influenced subsequent research on social institutions, education, crime, religion, and social integration. His emphasis on objectivity, scientific investigation, and the analysis of social facts remains one of the cornerstones of sociological methodology.

5.1.7 Comparative Analysis of Marx, Weber and Durkheim

Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim are regarded as the founding fathers of classical sociology due to the unique methodological approach used by each scholar for analyzing social realities. Even though all three sociologists attempted to study society in a systematic way in order to uncover the true nature of social life, their approaches to the study of social reality differed greatly as to the basic assumptions, role of the individual, causes of social change, etc. The methodologies of the three sociologists are viewed as three complementary traditions in sociology.

One of the important differences between Marx, Weber, and Durkheim is their understanding of society. In particular, for Marx, society is viewed as a system of economic relations involving inequality and class struggle. Ownership of the means of production determines the distribution of power and resources in society. For Durkheim, on the other hand, society is seen as a moral order based on norms and values which guarantee social

integration and stability. Weber, finally, was close to Durkheim in terms of emphasizing the role of meaningful actions in society.

The three classical sociologists' approaches differ in terms of the role of the individual in society. For Marx, for example, individual's behavior is determined by economic structures and relations. One's ideas, aspirations and opportunities depend on one's place in the system of production. Similarly, to Marx, Durkheim emphasized the role of society in shaping individuals; according to him, social facts exist independently of individuals and determine their behavior. Weber attached more importance to the role of the individual, suggesting that the study of society should focus on the motives and meanings of individual actions.

In terms of scientific method in sociology, there are important differences between the approaches of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Durkheim suggested the adoption of positivism as the scientific methodology in sociology and suggested that social facts should be observed and explained scientifically, the methodology being very similar to that used in the natural sciences. Marx also suggested a scientific approach but gave more importance to historical and dialectic analysis of social reality. Weber admitted the necessity of scientific approach but suggested that the subject matter of sociology, namely meaningful social actions, differs from those studied by the natural sciences. Thus, he developed an interpretive methodology.

Finally, there are important differences in the approaches of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim in terms of causal mechanisms in social life. Marx believed that the economic conditions are the fundamental cause of social institutions and changes. Political system, legal system, religion, and ideology are closely connected with the economic basis of society. Weber opposed economic determinism, suggesting that social phenomena have a variety of causes. Such as economic, political, religious, cultural, and historical, these factors interact to produce social results. Finally, Durkheim believed that social phenomena are best explained by social causes, that is by collective norms, institutions, and patterns of social organization.

There are some differences in the approaches to the role of values in sociology. Marx believed that sociology should disclose the exploitative character of society and contribute to its transformation. Therefore, Marxism possesses both scientific and critical dimension. Weber, in turn, believed that researchers can choose topics on the basis of personal preferences but should strive for value neutrality while conducting the

research. Durkheim also believed that sociologists should conduct scientific research in an impartial way and not make any subjective judgments while studying social facts.

Finally, there are differences in the approaches to social change. For Marx, social change is caused by class struggle and conflicts which occur between the opposing classes. It occurs when the contradictions inherent in the economic system become too strong and the existing order cannot be preserved anymore. For Durkheim, social change is a slow process which is caused by such phenomena as the growth of division of labor, population and structural differentiation and leads to new kinds of social solidarity. Finally, for Weber, social change occurs due to the interaction of many factors such as ideas, religious beliefs, political power, technology, and economic conditions. He believed that no factor can fully explain historical change.

However, despite the differences described above, there are some similarities in the approaches of the three classic sociologists. All three viewed Sociology as a distinct discipline which allows for the systematic study of society. Each one sought patterns in social life and thus contributed to the development of sociological concepts and methodology which can be used to analyze contemporary social phenomena such as inequality, bureaucracy, religion, globalization, social integration, and economic development.

Table 5.1.1 Comparative Methodological Perspectives of Marx, Weber and Durkheim

Dimension	Karl Marx	Max Weber	Émile Durkheim
Primary focus	Economic structure and class relations	Social action and subjective meaning	Social facts and social institutions
Nature of society	Conflict and inequality	Meaningful interaction	Social order and integration
Unit of analysis	Social classes and economic structures	Individual social action	Society and collective institutions
Methodological approach	Historical materialism and dialectics	Interpretive sociology (<i>Verstehen</i>)	Positivism and scientific observation

Explanation of social phenomena	Economic factors and class conflict	Multiple causes including ideas and culture	Social facts and functional relationships
Role of the individual	Influenced by economic structure	Active creator of social meaning	Guided by social norms and institutions
Scientific orientation	Historical and critical	Interpretive and objective	Empirical and positivist
View of social change	Class conflict and revolution	Multiple interacting causes	Evolution through social differentiation

The comparative analysis clearly shows that Marx, Weber, and Durkheim approached social phenomena from different intellectual traditions. The first one emphasized the significance of economic structures and conflict, the second – objective social facts and social integration, and the third one – subjective meanings and interpretation. All three methodological traditions provide a rich framework for the study of social phenomena and are widely used in contemporary sociological inquiry.

5.1.8 Strengths and Limitations of the Three Approaches

The methodological perspectives of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim have made a significant contribution to the development of sociology. They have provided us with different but complementary frameworks for the understanding of society and are still influencing sociological theory and research. At the same time, there are some limitations in the approaches of the three sociologists that have been pointed out by later sociologists.

Marx's methodology is very helpful in the study of the relationship between economic structures, social inequalities, and power. His emphasis on historical processes and class struggle is a very productive framework for the study of exploitation, labour relations, globalization, and economic crises. However, his approach has been criticized for its excessive emphasis on economic factors. The critics claim that not all aspects of society can be explained with the help of class relations or material conditions, but such factors as culture, religion, politics, ethnicity, and gender are also important in the shaping of the social life.

With his interpretative methodology, Weber made sociology more flexible by adding subjective meanings and motivations to sociological research. His concepts of *Verstehen*, ideal types, and value neutrality have become key principles of the qualitative social research approach. The awareness of various factors that lead to particular social phenomena increases the flexibility of social processes analysis. However, it could be said that interpretive methodology can sometimes be complicated to use because the understanding of individual motives can largely depend on the interpretation of the researcher. Therefore, the degree of objectivity in interpretive methodology could be lower compared to the approaches that are mostly based on the analysis of social facts.

The establishment of sociology as an empirical science through its objectivity, systematic observation, and study of social facts is associated with Durkheim's methodology. His research showed that many social phenomena have collective causes and cannot be explained only by the analysis of individual actions. The methodology proposed by Durkheim continues to influence quantitative research and analysis of social institutions. However, it has been criticized because Durkheim paid more attention to the analysis of social order and stability than to conflict and inequality. Besides, there is an opinion that sometimes his methodology underestimated the role of individual agency and the possibility of changes in society caused by individuals.

While every approach has certain advantages and disadvantages, they cannot be considered as conflicting explanations. In fact, these approaches offer us complementary tools for the study of different dimensions of society. Thus, the insights provided by Marx about economic structures and inequality, the principles suggested by Durkheim about social integration and stability, and the importance of human agency, ideas, and cultural values emphasized by Weber are very useful nowadays.

The significance of these methodological approaches in modern sociology consists in their ability to address different aspects of social reality. Modern sociologists use Marxian analyses in their works devoted to economic inequality and social conflict, Durkheimian principles in the study of institutions and social cohesion, and Weberian concepts in the study of organizations, leadership, religion, and culture. Therefore, the contribution made by these scholars proves that it is impossible to explain the society with one methodological approach, and it is often necessary to adopt a pluralist perspective on it.

5.1.9 Let Us Sum Up

Different methodological approaches to the study of society were created by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Marx explained the society from the standpoint of historical materialism and class conflict; he emphasized the importance of economic structures for the development of society. Weber created the interpretive methodology focused on social action, subjective meaning, ideal types, and value neutrality; Durkheim offered positivist methodology based on the objective study of social facts and the functional analysis of social institutions. Regardless of the difference in their perspectives, all these scholars tried to develop systematic explanations of social phenomena.

Comparative study of their methodologies shows the difference and complementarity of these approaches. Marx concentrated on conflict and structural inequality, Durkheim paid attention to social order and integration, and Weber studied the meanings behind the actions of individuals and the impact of ideas on society. Thus, these classical methodological approaches still guide sociological research and give us frameworks for the analysis of contemporary social problems.

5.1.10 Keywords

Methodology, Historical Materialism, Social Facts, Verstehen, Ideal Type, Value Neutrality, Positivism, Social Action, Class Conflict, Functionalism, Objectivity, Social Change

5.1.11 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Explain the major methodological differences between Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim.
2. Compare Marx's historical materialism with Weber's interpretive approach to sociology.
3. Discuss Durkheim's concept of social facts and explain how it differs from Weber's concept of social action.
4. Examine the strengths and limitations of the methodological approaches of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.
5. Why is a comparative study of the methodologies of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim important for understanding sociological research?

Lesson 5.2 - Religion: Durkheim and Weber

Structure

- 5.2.1 Objectives
- 5.2.2 Introduction
- 5.2.3 Why Compare Durkheim and Weber on Religion?
- 5.2.4 Durkheim's Perspective on Religion
- 5.2.5 Weber's Perspective on Religion
- 5.2.6 Comparative Analysis of Durkheim and Weber
- 5.2.7 Contemporary Relevance of Their Perspectives
- 5.2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.2.9 Keywords
- 5.2.10 Self-Assessment Questions

5.2.1 Objectives

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

- compare the sociological perspectives of Durkheim and Weber on religion.
- distinguish the similarities and differences between their approaches.
- evaluate the contemporary relevance of their views on religion and society.

5.2.2 Introduction

Religion is one of the main objects of sociological analysis because it affects individual beliefs, social relations, cultural values, and institutions. Classical sociologists did not consider religion simply as a belief system but as a social institution that affects the behavior of people and helps to create social order. Among founders of sociology, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber presented two of the most influential but contrasting explanations of religion. They recognized its importance but had different approaches to its origin, functions, and role in society.

Durkheim considered religion mainly as a collective phenomenon that increases social solidarity and reinforces values of community. At the same

time, Weber analyzed religion as a source of ideas and motives that could affect the behavior of people and cause social and economic changes. In contrast to the repetition of theories offered in the previous unit, the current lesson aims to compare these sociological perspectives on religion.

5.2.3 Why Compare Durkheim and Weber on Religion?

Religion is a universal social institution present in almost every society, and there are various explanations of its role and significance. Durkheim and Weber had different methodological traditions and, therefore, came to different conclusions concerning religion because of it. Comparison of their perspectives helps students to learn about the diversity of sociological explanations and to see how different methodological approaches highlight different aspects of religious life.

For example, Durkheim studied religion from the structural and functional perspectives. He was mainly interested in explanation of the way in which religion influences the stability and integration of society. For him, religion could strengthen collective conscience and promote social cohesion and moral values. Thus, it serves an important social function because it helps to maintain social solidarity among members of community.

Weber used an interpretive methodology and focused on the meanings attached to religious beliefs and practices. Instead of the question of the way in which religion maintains social order, he researched how the ideas could affect the behavior of individuals and historical changes. His studies proved that religious beliefs could affect economic attitudes, political institutions, and patterns of social organization. Therefore, religion is not just a reflection of society but also an active element that can change it.

It can be seen from the comparison of these perspectives that religion plays multiple roles in society. It can increase social integration, as Durkheim claimed, and act as an agent of social and economic changes, as Weber claimed. These perspectives are therefore complementary but not contradictory because they highlight different aspects of the relationship between religion and society.

In addition, these contrasting views add value to the study of sociology through the encouragement of learners to conduct their analysis of religion from both structuralist and interpretive perspectives. Religion continues to play a role in the present day societies in terms of its impact on politics, education, identity formation, social movements and economic behavior.

Hence, the insights offered by Durkheim and Weber are still useful for the analysis of these phenomena and the relevance of religion in contemporary society.

5.2.4 Durkheim's Theory of Religion

Émile Durkheim suggested that religion should be considered as a social institution that arises within the context of collective life and does not come from supernatural powers or any private beliefs of individuals. The ideas of Durkheim imply that religion mirrors the values, norms and collective conscience of society. Hence, he stated that when people venerate sacred things or symbols, in reality, they express their respect towards the society to which they belong. As a result, religion is symbolic representation of the society and acts as a means for strengthening social unity.

There is the opposition between sacred and profane in the ideas of Durkheim, and this distinction constitutes the essence of religion in his view. Sacred things, places, beliefs and rituals are venerated and isolated from the profane, which consists of ordinary activities of people's everyday lives. Religious rituals serve as a tool for the reinforcement of this separation and the creation of group membership.

The concept of collective effervescence is also crucial in the sociology of Durkheim. During religious ceremonies and collective rituals, people experience emotional ties with each other that make them feel closer to their group. This phenomenon increases the power of collective consciousness and stimulates conformity to common moral values. Religion, hence, promotes the social integration through the formation of solidarity and support of social norms.

The functions of religion in society were also highlighted by Durkheim. Religion serves as a source of moral guidance, social cohesion, regulation of people's behavior and as a means of coping with crises. It contributes to strengthening community life and to the establishment of social order through shared beliefs and rituals. Even in the modern society, where traditional religious practices may diminish, Durkheim was sure that the integrative functions of religion can be fulfilled through secular institutions and collective ideals.

Although the theory of Durkheim has been criticized due to the lack of attention to religious diversity, conflict and changes in society, his functional approach continues to influence the sociological analysis

of religion. Religion as a source of social integration remains the key contribution of his works to the sociology of religion.

5.2.5 Weber's Theory of Religion

Max Weber analyzed religion from an interpretive point of view emphasizing the meaning of religious beliefs and practices for individuals. In contrast to Durkheim, who considered religion as a source of social integration, Weber was interested in the influence of religious ideas on human actions and contribution to history and social changes. He suggested that religion is not only a reflection of society but also shapes economic systems, political institutions and patterns of social organization.

The most famous contribution of Weber to the sociology of religion is his analysis of the relationship between religion and capitalism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber suggested that certain Protestant beliefs, particularly those associated with Calvinism, fostered the values of diligence, frugality and rational economic activities. These religious values contributed to the formation of modern capitalism in Western Europe. Hence, Weber proved that ideas and beliefs can act as very influential forces that shape economic and social development.

Weber also conducted a comparative analysis of the world religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. His aim was the investigation of the influence of various religious beliefs on economic behavior, political organization and social institutions. He came to the conclusion that different belief systems foster different forms of social action and promote different patterns of social development in various societies.

The other important feature of the sociological theory of Weber is the concept of rationalization. He observed that the contemporary societies depend more and more on reason, calculation, efficiency and systematic organization rather than on traditions and religion. Despite the fact that religion had played a major role in the formation of modern Western society, Weber claimed that the process of modernization leads to the secularization and decline of the role of religious explanations in various spheres of life. He called this phenomenon "the disenchantment of the world" because scientific knowledge and rational thinking replace mysticism and supernatural explanations.

Weber did not consider religion to be either positive or negative for society. He viewed it as a social force with variable influence depending

on the historical and cultural context. In certain cases, religious beliefs may contribute to social stability while in others, they foster economic transformation, political reforms or social movements. Such balanced attitude allowed him to explain the various functions of religion in different societies.

The theory of Weber significantly increased the scope of the sociology of religion because he showed that ideas, beliefs and values can have the same effect on social structures as the economic conditions do. His ideas still influence sociological research of religion, culture, modernization and globalization.

5.2.6 Comparative Analysis of Durkheim and Weber

Despite the fact that Émile Durkheim and Max Weber considered religion as an important social institution, they explained its nature and significance from different perspectives. The approach of Durkheim was functional as he focused on the role of religion in the maintenance of social order and integration while Weber used an interpretive approach analyzing the influence of religious beliefs on individual behavior and contribution to social changes. These different approaches have contributed to the development of the sociology of religion.

One of the main distinctions between these two sociologists is in their perceptions of the origin of religion. Durkheim claimed that religion originates in the context of society itself. According to him, religious beliefs and symbols are representations of the collective life of a community and worship is, actually, a reflection of the moral authority of the society over individuals. However, Weber considered religion as a system of beliefs created by individuals and communities in order to answer the questions about life, suffering, morality and salvation. He was less concerned with the origin of religion than with its influence on social actions and historical processes.

Another difference in the sociological perspective on religion concerns the functions of religion. While Durkheim viewed religion mainly as an institution promoting social integration and cohesion, Weber admitted that religious ideas may not only preserve social unity but also lead to dramatic social transformations. Religion may promote the adoption of new economic practices, the criticism of social institutions and social reforms.

Yet another difference concerns the impact of religion on social change. Durkheim underlined the functions of religion in preserving

social order while Weber demonstrated that religious beliefs and ideas could bring about major historical changes. The sociologist's theory about the relationship between Protestantism and the rise of capitalism is a vivid example that religion may transform economic behavior.

There were also considerable differences in the methodological approaches used by the sociologists. While Durkheim analyzed religion as an objective phenomenon, a social fact, that had to be investigated through the methods of empirical observation and study of institutions and practices, Weber developed an interpretive approach aimed at the analysis of meanings people attribute to religious ideas and beliefs. Thus, the first sociologist underlined the objective structures while the second focused on subjective understanding of the actors.

Despite all these differences, there were certain common assumptions of Durkheim and Weber. Neither of them provided purely theological interpretations of religion as a phenomenon but both of them viewed religion as a proper topic for sociological investigation. They agreed that religion performed vital social functions and influenced the major aspects of people's lives. They both agreed that religion should be studied not only as an institution of individual but as a part of larger socio-historical context.

Table 5.2.1 Comparative Perspectives of Durkheim and Weber on Religion

Dimension	Émile Durkheim	Max Weber
Primary concern	Social integration and cohesion	Social action and historical change
Methodological approach	Functional and positivist	Interpretive (<i>Verstehen</i>)
Origin of religion	Society and collective consciousness	Meaningful beliefs and values
Main function	Maintain social solidarity	Influence social and economic behaviour
Focus of analysis	Collective rituals and institutions	Individual beliefs and motivations
Religion and social change	Promotes social stability	Can promote social transformation

Key concept	Sacred and profane	Protestant ethic and rationalization
View of religion	Reflection of society	Independent social force influencing society

Comparison of Durkheim's and Weber's approaches demonstrates that the scholars presented complementary views on religion. While the first one viewed religion as a social institution that promotes social integration and moral order, the second one focused on the possibility of religion to exert an impact on social action and historical development. Therefore, their views combined help understand religion as a stabilizing institution and as a factor of social transformation.

5.2.7 Contemporaneous Relevance of Their Perspectives

Sociological perspectives of Durkheim and Weber remain extremely relevant when investigating the role of religion in contemporary society. Despite the fact that modernization, globalization and scientific development have transformed religious practices all over the world, religion remains an influential social institution, which has the power to shape identities, values, politics and economic behavior of people. The theories of the sociologists offer important frameworks for investigating these changing dynamics.

The perspective of Durkheim still remains relevant when explaining how religion helps in promoting social integration and social cohesion and in strengthening the collective identity. The institutions of religion still offer moral guidance, coordinate the activities of the community, engage in charitable activity and promote social solidarity in times of crisis. Festivals, pilgrimages, collective worship – all these activities help to strengthen the social ties by uniting people and reinforcing the collective values. In the multicultural society religion also helps to preserve cultural traditions and collective identity.

Nevertheless, contemporary societies demonstrate the fact that religion may serve as a factor of social conflict, especially if religious identities coincide with ethnic, political and cultural identities. While the sociologist mainly focused on the integrative functions of religion, modern societies prove that religion can simultaneously unite people belonging to the same group and create conflicts between different groups. Thus, this is one of the limitations of his functionalist perspective and calls for additional explanations.

The perspective of Weber is very important in analyzing the relationship between religion and social change. Religious beliefs still influence political involvement, educational establishments, economic activities, environmental movements and social reforms. In many countries religious institutions take an active part in poverty reduction, healthcare, disaster relief and human rights advocacy. Thus, the emphasis of Weber on the power of ideas still helps to explain why religious values play a role in social life in spite of the increase in secularization.

The process of rationalization described by Weber is also characteristic for the institutions of modern societies. Modern societies more and more rely on science, technology, bureaucracy and evidence-based decisions. At the same time religion is adapting to new social conditions through using of digital communication, formation of virtual religious communities and creation of new forms of worship. These examples prove that modernization transforms religion instead of destroying its social importance.

Perspectives of Durkheim and Weber remain important for the investigation of religious diversity in a globalized world. Migration, globalization and intercultural interaction have brought different religions into much closer contacts than before. Knowledge of both integrative functions of religion and its impact on social actions is necessary for the analysis of religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, identity politics and secularization.

In contemporary sociology, perspectives of Durkheim and Weber are often combined to obtain a more balanced perceive of religion. Durkheim explains how religion helps in promoting social cohesion and collective identity while Weber explains how religious beliefs influence individual behavior and social changes. Their perspectives still guide the research in the field of religion in modern societies.

5.2.8 Let Us Sum Up

Two of the most influential sociological perspectives on religion were developed by Durkheim and Weber. The former explained religion as a social institution, which reinforces collective consciousness and promotes social solidarity and moral order through shared beliefs and rituals. The latter saw religion as a system of meaningful ideas, which was able to influence the behavior of people and historical processes.

The comparison of the perspectives demonstrates that religion plays multiple roles in social life. On the one hand, it contributes to social

cohesion, cultural continuity and moral regulation. On the other hand, it influences economic activities, political institutions and processes of social changes. The perspectives of both sociologists help to understand the role of religion in traditional and modern societies.

5.2.9 Keywords

Religion, Sacred, Profane, Collective Consciousness, Social Integration, Social Solidarity, Social Action, Protestant Ethic, Rationalization, Secularization, Collective Effervescence, Disenchantment

5.2.10 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Compare Durkheim's and Weber's perspectives on the nature and functions of religion.
2. Explain the similarities and differences between Durkheim's and Weber's approaches to the sociology of religion.
3. Discuss Durkheim's concept of religion as a source of social integration and compare it with Weber's interpretation of religion as a force for social change.
4. Evaluate the contemporary relevance of Durkheim's and Weber's theories of religion.
5. Why are the sociological perspectives of Durkheim and Weber considered complementary in the study of religion?

Lesson 5.3 - Capitalism: Marx and Weber

Structure

- 5.3.1 Objectives
- 5.3.2 Introduction
- 5.3.3 Why Compare Marx and Weber on Capitalism?
- 5.3.4 Marx's Perspective on Capitalism
- 5.3.5 Weber's Perspective on Capitalism
- 5.3.6 Comparative Analysis of Marx and Weber
- 5.3.7 Contemporary Relevance of Their Perspectives
- 5.3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.3.9 Keywords
- 5.3.10 Self-Assessment Questions

5.3.1 Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, the learner will be able to:

- compare the perspectives of Karl Marx and Max Weber on capitalism.
- distinguish the similarities and differences between their interpretations of capitalism.
- evaluate the relevance of Marx's and Weber's ideas for understanding contemporary capitalist societies

5.3.2 Introduction

Capitalism is one of the most widely researched themes in the field of sociology due to its tremendous impact on the economic organization, political institutions, social relations, and social inequalities. Among the classical sociologists, Karl Marx and Max Weber were the most prominent representatives of the approaches to the interpretation of capitalism. Both sociologists recognized the significance of capitalism for the modern society but viewed its emergence, evolution, and consequences differently.

For Marx, capitalism is an economic system which is based on the private ownership of the means of production and characterized by

exploitation, surplus value, and class conflicts. For Weber, the emergence of capitalism is associated with certain ideas, culture, religion, and rational organization. Unlike previous lessons, in this lesson we compare their perspectives on capitalism.

5.3.3 Why Compare Marx and Weber on Capitalism?

Capitalism has had a great impact on society changing patterns of production, employment, technology, political systems, etc. As soon as the concept of capitalism emerged, sociologists tried to understand why it developed, how it functions, and what consequences it brings. Two most influential explanations of these processes were proposed by Karl Marx and Max Weber. These sociologists emphasized different dimensions of capitalism.

Firstly, Marx considered capitalism as an economic system. He maintained that capitalism involves private ownership of the means of production and is characterized by exploitation of labour force, accumulation of capital, and conflicts between the bourgeois and proletarians. In other words, according to Marx, economic structures are crucial for understanding the organization of society as well as social inequalities and conflicts.

Weber agreed that economic factors play an important role but, nevertheless, he argued that they do not explain fully why capitalism emerged and developed. According to Weber, the emergence of capitalism was influenced significantly by culture, ideas, values, religion, and history. More precisely, Weber showed that certain ideas such as those linked to Protestantism facilitated rational economic behavior.

In sum, comparison of their perspectives shows that capitalism cannot be explained just by economic analysis or just by cultural approach. On the one hand, Marx highlights structural inequalities and class relations in capitalism. On the other hand, Weber explains the social and cultural conditions that enabled capitalist institutions to emerge.

Furthermore, comparative study fosters critical thinking as it helps to show that the same social phenomenon can be explained using different theoretical approaches. Nowadays, capitalism is formed by economic globalization, innovations, multinational corporations, financial markets, and digital platforms. The analysis of these phenomena requires the consideration of both economic and cultural factors. Therefore, Marx and Weber are still essential for the analysis of modern capitalist societies.

5.3.4 Marx's Perspective on Capitalism

Karl Marx considered capitalism as a particular stage in the development of society which emerged after feudalism through changes in the mode of production. He claimed that capitalism is a society which is characterized by the private ownership of the means of production when factories, land, machinery, and other resources belong to a relatively small group of people called capitalists and most of people sell their labour in exchange for the payment.

According to Marx, the most characteristic feature of capitalism is the extraction of surplus value. People produce goods and services which are worth more than the payment they get. The surplus is appropriated by the owners of capital in the form of profits. Thus, the accumulation of capital depends on the exploitation of labour force. Marx considered this feature of capitalism as its fundamental structure rather than the result of personal interests.

Moreover, Marx showed that capitalism involves alienation when people are separated from the products of their labour, the production process, other people, and their creative capabilities. In other words, since production is aimed at making profits rather than satisfying human needs, it is mechanical and repetitive. Thus, people lose their creativity and become instruments of production. It is one of the major social consequences of capitalist organization.

In addition, class conflicts between capitalists who own the means of production and proletarians who are engaged in wage labour are an important part of Marx's theory. Their interests are opposed because capitalists try to gain the maximum profits and proletarians fight for higher wages and good working conditions. Marx predicted that these conflicts would intensify over time leading to social revolution.

Furthermore, Marx claimed that capitalism includes internal contradictions which make it inherently unstable. Economic crises, unemployment, concentration of capital and increasing inequality are considered to be inevitable results of capitalism. Thus, he predicted that they would eventually lead to the emergence of the socialist mode of production based on the collective ownership.

Although many features of capitalism have changed since Marx's time, his theory is still widely used for researching labour markets, income inequality, globalization, corporations' power, and economic crises.

5.3.5 Weber's Perspective on Capitalism

Max Weber interpreted capitalism quite differently from Karl Marx. Marx explained capitalism mainly from the economic perspective considering class relations as its most characteristic feature. But Weber tried to understand the historical, cultural, and religious factors that led to the emergence of capitalism.

Weber's significant contribution to classical sociology includes his analysis of the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. He argues that certain religious ideas, especially the ones of Calvinists, motivate disciplined work, punctuality, honesty, frugality, and systematic reinvestment of profits. These qualities promote rational approach to economics and favorable conditions for modern capitalism development. Therefore, Weber proves that ideas can influence significantly economic development.

There are some important features that distinguish modern rational capitalism from other forms of economic activities. Economic trade and gain have existed for centuries, but modern capitalism implies systematic organization, calculation, management, and reinvestment in order to achieve long-term economic growth. According to Weber, these characteristics make Western capitalism unique and cause its fast development.

The concept of rationalization is another important feature of Weber's analysis. He emphasizes that modern capitalist societies use more and more effectiveness, planning, science and formal rules in both economic and administrative spheres. Organizations operate on the principles of systematic accounting, specialization of labor, invention of technology and management by bureaucracy. Rationalization leads to increased efficiency and productivity, but also to formation of highly structured organizations, based on formal regulation.

Capitalism is tightly connected to the development of bureaucracy that Weber considers as the most effective form of organization in modern society. Bureaucracies have clear hierarchy, division of labor, formal rules, merit appointment and standardized procedures. Such organizational structures allow managing effectively large-scale economic companies and administrative institutions making bureaucracy an integral part of modern capitalist economy.

At the same time Weber acknowledges the advantages of capitalism in promoting economic development and effective management but also

notices its limitations. Increasing rationalization can decrease significantly people's freedom because of being subjected to formal organizational rules and administration. Weber describes this situation as an "iron cage of rationality".

Weber's perspective broadens sociological understanding of capitalism, proving that economic systems depend not only on material interests but also on culture, religion and rational organization. His work influences greatly modern research on organizations, entrepreneurship, management, globalization and economic sociology.

5.3.6 Comparative Analysis of Marx and Weber

Karl Marx and Max Weber have offered two of the most influential interpretations of capitalism in classical sociology. Although they acknowledge capitalism as the predominant economic system of modern society, there is a great difference between their approaches. Marx focuses mainly on economic structures, class relations and exploitation. Weber concentrates his attention on the aspects of culture, religion, ideas and rational organization. Their views are complementary interpretations of capitalist development.

The main difference between the two thinkers consists in their ideas about the origin of capitalism. Marx believes that capitalism has appeared because of the historical changes in the mode of production. Transition from feudalism to capitalism takes place as a result of changes in economic relations, technical development and concentration of production in private hands. However, Weber believes that the development of capitalism cannot be explained exclusively in economic terms. He argues that certain religious values, including Protestant Ethic, motivate disciplined work, saving, investing and rational economic behavior.

There are also significant differences in their ideas about the driving force of capitalism. According to Marx, the pursuit of profit through exploitation of labor is the essential feature of the capitalist system. Capital accumulation is possible due to appropriation of surplus value from workers, leading to inequality between capitalists and laborers. However, Weber agrees that profit is very important but the success of capitalism depends equally on rational organization, efficient management, disciplined labor and favorable cultural values.

Their explanations of social inequality are also quite different. Marx sees inequality as a result of the unequal possession of means of production.

Society is split into classes with opposite interests causing inevitable conflict because of the economic inequality. Weber also acknowledges the importance of class but sees the stratification in multi-dimensional aspect. In addition to economic class, social status and political power can also influence the position of people in society. Therefore, Weber's explanation is more complex than Marxist economic view.

An important difference consists in the role of ideas and culture. Marx sees ideas, religion and ideology just as the reflection of economic reality. But Weber disagrees with this one-sided explanation and claims that ideas themselves can influence economic and social development. Analysis of the Protestant Ethic is the illustration of his idea that cultural values can shape economic institutions.

These sociologists also have different visions of the future of capitalism. Marx predicts that capitalism has internal contradictions that will cause economic crisis, class conflict and eventually replacement of capitalism by socialism. But Weber does not make any predictions concerning this issue. He argues that capitalism will expand because of increasing rationalization and bureaucracy. This process may restrict people's freedom because of creation of highly organized social institutions.

Table 5.3.1 Comparative Perspectives of Marx and Weber on Capitalism

Dimension	Karl Marx	Max Weber
Primary focus	Economic structure and class relations	Culture, ideas, and rational organization
Origin of capitalism	Historical development of the mode of production	Protestant ethic and rationalization
Driving force	Profit through exploitation of labour	Rational enterprise and disciplined economic activity
Role of religion	Reflects economic conditions	Influences economic development
View of inequality	Based on ownership of the means of production	Determined by class, status, and power
Nature of capitalism	Exploitative and conflict-ridden	Rational and organizationally efficient

Future of capitalism	Collapse through internal contradictions	Expansion of rationalization and bureaucracy
Major concern	Exploitation and class conflict	Rationalization and organizational efficiency

However, there are also some important similarities between Marx and Weber. They acknowledge capitalism as historically determined economic system and not as permanent feature of society. Both analyze capitalism in sociological terms and recognize the enormous influence of capitalism on social institutions, political organization and everyday life. They also agree that capitalism transforms the relationships between people, work and forms of authority. But they explain the mechanism of this transformation in different ways.

The comparison shows that Marx and Weber analyzed capitalism from different perspectives. Marx explains the structural features of capitalist production and inequality, but Weber focuses on the cultural and organizational factors that led to development of capitalism. Combined, their theories give the valuable understanding of functioning and development of modern capitalist societies.

5.3.7 Contemporary Relevance of Their Perspectives

The perspectives of Karl Marx and Max Weber still remain highly relevant for the understanding of nature and functioning of modern capitalist societies. Although capitalism has changed greatly since the nineteenth century, the problems raised by classical sociologists are still actual for the discussions about economic development, globalization, labor relations and social inequality.

The perspective of Marx remains particularly useful in understanding economic inequality and wealth concentration. In many countries, economic development goes hand in hand with rising economic inequality, unequal access to resources and living standards. Multinational corporations wield significant economic power while many workers face problems like insecurity of employment, inequalities in pay and lack of job protection. The Marxist theory of class relations, capital accumulation and exploitation remains relevant for the research of labour markets and corporations.

The Marxist theory remains useful for the analysis of the consequences of globalization. Contemporary production is carried out within

international supply chains that involve producers, workers and consumers in several countries. Although globalization creates new economic opportunities, there are concerns about labour exploitation, informal employment, outsourcing and unequal distribution of economic benefits. These developments represent the structure of inequalities described by Marx in the context of capitalist economies.

The ideas of Weber remain useful for the analysis of the role of rationalization and bureaucracy in contemporary society. Contemporary organizations of any kind, whether governmental agencies, business corporations, educational institutions or healthcare organizations, operate using formal structures, specialisation, technological systems and other elements of rational organization. Moreover, the development of digital technologies, automation and data-based management shows the continuing relevance of Weber's analysis of bureaucracy.

Weber's emphasis on the role of ideas and culture remains relevant. The ideas of entrepreneurship, innovation, professionalism, consumption and organization play significant roles in the economic development of contemporary societies. Economic success is not determined exclusively by financial capital but also by education, technology, organization and the culture of work. Therefore, the argument of Weber about the role of ideas in the formation of economic institutions receives much support in the modern economic sociology.

The rapid development of digital economy represents another example of the continuing relevance of the ideas of both theorists. Technological corporations depend on rational organization, innovation and high skilled labour force, which is a result of rationalization according to the ideas of Weber. On the other hand, discussions about labour rights, platform work, income inequality, market concentration and corporate control over digital resources reveal many issues discussed by Marx in terms of power, property and exploitation.

Contemporary sociologists understand the impossibility of using only one perspective in the explanation of the complexity of modern capitalism. Whereas Marx provides a strong theoretical background for the analysis of inequalities and class relations, Weber explains the influence of ideas, values and organizational mechanisms on the economic development. Combining the ideas of both sociologists, sociologists can build a comprehensive picture of modern capitalist societies.

5.3.8 Let Us Sum Up

Karl Marx and Max Weber provided two of the most influential sociological interpretations of capitalism. According to Marx, capitalism is an economic system with such characteristics as private property, surplus value, exploitation, alienation and class conflict. The key feature of the Marxian theory is its focus on the structural inequalities inherent in the process of capitalist production. Weber, in his turn, emphasizes the role of religious values, rationalization, bureaucracy and other factors of the emergence and development of modern capitalism. While Marx gives attention to economic structure, Weber adopts a wider perspective.

A comparative analysis of the theories of Marx and Weber reveals that capitalism is a complex social system that cannot be interpreted from a single perspective. Marxian theory gives valuable insights into the issues of inequality, labour relations and class conflict while the Weberian approach explains the significance of ideas, rational organization and institutional development. Therefore, the ideas of both theorists remain essential tools for the interpretation of globalization, economic changes and organizational development.

5.3.9 Keywords

Capitalism, Surplus Value, Class Conflict, Rationalization, Protestant Ethic, Bureaucracy.

5.3.10 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Compare Marx's and Weber's interpretations of the origin and development of capitalism.
2. Explain the major similarities and differences between Marx's and Weber's perspectives on capitalism.
3. Discuss the role of economic structures in Marx's theory and the role of ideas and culture in Weber's theory of capitalism.
4. Evaluate the contemporary relevance of Marx's and Weber's perspectives in understanding modern capitalist societies.
5. Why are Marx's and Weber's theories considered complementary in the sociological analysis of capitalism?

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