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## UNIT 14 IDEAL TYPES

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### 14.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you should be able to

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

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### 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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This is the first unit of the block on Max Weber. It deals with the concept of ideal type as part of Max Weber's concern with methodology of social sciences. This unit gives a perspective and a background to analyse the major theoretical formulations of Max Weber.

In this unit first we clarify the general meaning of ideal type and explain the sociological concept and characteristics of ideal-type as reflected in the writing of Max Weber. Here we also answer two questions as to how and why of social scientists' construction of ideal type in their researches. Weber used ideal type in three distinctive ways. We explain these three ways of use of ideal type in Weber's work in terms of (a) ideal types of historical particulars, (b) ideal types of abstract elements of social reality and (c) ideal types relating to the reconstruction of a particular kind of behaviour. We examine each of these kinds with suitable illustrations.

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## 14.2 IDEAL TYPES: MEANING, CONSTRUCTION AND CHARACTERISTICS

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To Max Weber, the term 'ideal type' has a distinctive meaning and there are certain underlying principles pertaining to its construction. Here in this section we shall explain the general and Weberian meanings of the term 'ideal type', its construction and characteristics.

### 14.2.0 Meaning

Let us begin with the dictionary meaning of the terms 'ideal' and 'type'. According to New Webster's Dictionary (NWD 1985), 'ideal' is a 'conception or a standard of something in its highest perfection'. It refers to a mental image or conception rather than a material object. It is a model. The Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary says: 'Your ideal of something is the person or thing that seems to you to be the best example of it'.

The term 'type' means a kind, class or group as distinguished by a particular character (NWD 1985). Thus, generally speaking, we may conceptualise ideal type as a kind, category, class or group of objects, things or persons with particular character that seems to be the best example of it.

Weber used ideal type in a specific sense. To him, ideal type is a mental construct, like a model, for the scrutiny and systematic characterisation of a concrete situation. Indeed, he used ideal type as a methodological tool to understand and analyse social reality.

Methodology is the conceptual and logical research procedure by which knowledge is developed. Historically much of the methodological concern in the social sciences has been directed towards establishing their scientific credentials (Mitchell 1968: 118). Max Weber was particularly concerned with the problem of objectivity in social sciences. Hence he used ideal type as a methodological tool that looks at reality objectively. It scrutinises, classifies, systematises and defines social reality without subjective bias. The ideal type has nothing to do with values. Its function, as a research tool, is for classification and comparison. To quote Max Weber (1971: 63):

"The ideal typical concept will develop our skill in imputation in research. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description".

In other words, ideal types are concepts formulated on the basis of facts collected carefully and analytically for empirical research. In this sense, ideal types are constructs or concepts which are used as methodological devices or tools in our understanding and analysis of any social problem.

To understand ideal types, as used by Max Weber, we explain how ideal types are constructed.

### 14.2.1 Construction

Ideal types are formulated by the abstraction and combination of an indefinite number of elements, which though found in reality, are rarely or never discovered in specific form. Therefore, Weber does not consider that he is establishing a new conceptual method. He emphasises that he is making explicit what is already done in practice. For the construction of ideal types, the sociologist selects a certain number of traits from the whole which is otherwise confusing and obscure, to constitute an intelligible entity. For example, if we wish to study the state of democracy in India (or for that matter of secularism, communalism, equality a court of law) then our first task will be to define the concept of democracy with the help of its essential and typical characteristics. Here we can mention some of the essential characteristics of democracy, namely, existence of a multi-party system, universal adult franchise, formation of government by peoples representatives, peoples participation in the decision making, equality before law, respect to majority verdict and each others' views as well. This formulation of a pure type or an ideal type concept of democracy will guide us and work as a tool in our analysis. Any deviation from or conformity to it will unfold the reality. Ideal types, therefore, do not represent the common or the average characteristics but focus on the typical and the essential characteristics. For instance in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber analyses the characteristics of the 'Calvinist Ethic'. These characteristics are taken from various historical writings and involve those components of Calvinist doctrines which Weber identifies as of particular importance in relation to the formation of the capitalist spirit. Ideal types are thus a selection of certain elements, certain traits or characteristics which are distinctive and relevant to the study undertaken. However, one thing which should be kept in mind here is that though ideal types are constructed from facts existing in reality, they do not represent or describe the total reality, they are of pure types in a logical sense. According to Weber 'in its conceptual purity, this ideal mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality'. This then is the way in which ideal types are constructed. To facilitate our understanding later in this unit we will take up those ideal type concepts which have been used by Weber. Let us have a close look at construction of an ideal type of a court of law shown in figure 14.1.



Figure 14.1: Ideal Type of Court of Law

### 14.2.2 Characteristics

From the above discussion we can draw some important characteristics of ideal types.

- i) Ideal types are not general or average types. That is, they are not defined by the characteristics common to all phenomena or objects of study. They are formulated on the basis of certain typical traits, which are essential to the construction of an ideal type concept.
- ii) Ideal types are not a presentation of total reality or they do not explain everything. They exhibit partial conception of the whole.
- iii) Ideal types are neither a description of any definite concept of reality, nor a hypothesis, but they can aid both in description and explanation. Ideal types are different in scope and usage from descriptive concepts. If descriptive concepts can be used, for instance, in the classification of different sects, and if one wants to apply the distinction in order to analyse the importance of these for the economic activity, then one has to reformulate the concept of sect to emphasise the specific components of sectarianism which have been influential in the economic pursuit. The concept then becomes an ideal typical one, meaning that any descriptive concept can be transformed into an ideal type through abstraction and recombination of certain elements when we wish to explain or analyse rather than describe a phenomenon.
- iv) In this sense we can say that ideal types are also related to the analytic conception of causality, though not, in deterministic terms.
- v) They also help in reaching to general propositions and in comparative analysis.
- vi) Ideal types serve to guide empirical research, and are used in systematisation of data on historical and social reality.

After learning about the meaning, construction and characteristics of ideal type it will not be at all difficult for you to complete Check Your Progress 1.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Tick mark the correct answer to the following question.  
What are ideal types?
  - a) Ideal types are general types.
  - b) Ideal types are average types.
  - c) Ideal types are pure types.
  - d) Ideal types are normative types.
- ii) Tick mark True or False box given below each of the following statements.
  - a) Ideal type is a description of reality. True/False

- b) Ideal type helps in the analysis and explanation of a social phenomenon. True/False
- c) Ideal types are constructed by selection of typical and essential traits. True/False
- d) Ideal types are hypotheses. True/False
- e) Ideal types represent a total reality. True/False
- f) Ideal types help in the causal and in comparative analysis. True/False

### 14.3 PURPOSE AND USE OF IDEAL TYPES

Ideal types are constructed to facilitate the analysis of empirical questions. Most researchers are not fully aware of the concepts they use. As a result their formulations often tend to be imprecise and ambiguous, or as Weber himself says, ‘the language which the historians talk contains hundreds of words which are ambiguous constructs created to meet the unconsciously conceived need for adequate expression, and whose meaning is definitely felt, but not clearly thought out’ (Weber 1949: 92-3).

It is however the job of social scientists to render subject matter intelligible by avoiding confusion and obscurity. For example, we may talk about the construction of ideal types of authority. Weber distinguishes three types of authority, namely, rational, legal, traditional, and charismatic, each of which was defined by the motivation of obedience or by the nature of legitimacy claimed by the leader. Reality presents a mixture or confusion of the three ideal types and because of this very reason we must approach the types of authority with a clear idea. Because these types merge in reality each must be rigorously defined.

Ideal types are not formed out of a nexus of purely conceptual thought, but are created, modified and sharpened through the empirical analysis of concrete problems. This, in turn, increases the precision of that analysis.

We can therefore say that, ideal types are a methodological device which not only help us in the analysis of empirical questions, but also in avoiding obscurity and ambiguity in the concepts used, and in increasing the accuracy of our analysis. Completing Activity 1 at this stage will help you appreciate the process of construction of an ideal type.

#### Activity 1

You may be aware of the functioning of the institution of Village Panchayat in the rural areas and that of the Municipal Corporation in the urban areas. If you are living in a rural Area, construct an ideal type of a Village Panchayat. If you are living in an urban area, construct an ideal type of a Municipal Corporation. Exchange your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

Ideal type, a key term in Weber’s methodological essays has been used by him as a device in understanding historical configurations or specific

historical problems. For this he constructed ideal types, that is, to understand how events had actually taken place and to show that if some antecedents or other events had not occurred or had occurred differently, the event we are trying to explain would have been different as well. For example, because of the implementation of the land reform laws and penetration of other modernising forces, like education, modern occupation etc., the joint family system has broken down in rural India. This means that there is a causal relation between the event (land reform, education and modern occupation) and the situation (the joint family). In this way ideal type concept also helps in the causal explanation of a phenomenon.

This, however, does not mean that every event has a particular or a specific cause. Weber does not believe that one element of society is determined by another. He conceives the causal relations both in history and sociology as partial and probable relations. It means that a given fragment of reality makes probable or improbable, favourable or unfavourable to another fragment of reality. For instance, certain Marxists would say that private ownership of the means of production makes inevitable the political power of the minority possessing these means. Weber would say that an economic regime of total planning makes a certain type of political organisation more probable. In Weber's work such analysis of causal relations was related to his interest in world wide comparisons or in analysis of events and establishment of general preposition. That is, he used ideal types to build up a conception of a particular historical case, and used the same ideal type conceptions for a comparative analysis. This interdependence of history and sociology appears most clearly in Weber's conception of the ideal type.

Besides examining any particular historical case Max Weber also used ideal types to analyse the abstract elements of social reality and to explain particular kinds of social behaviour. We shall discuss these in greater detail in the following section, dealing with ideal type in the body of Weber's work.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) How do we construct ideal type? Answer in about two lines.  
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- ii) What is the purpose of constructing ideal type? Answer in about three lines.  
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**14.4 IDEAL TYPES IN WEBER'S WORK**

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Weber used ideal types in three distinctive ways. Indeed, his three kinds of ideal types are distinguished by three levels of abstraction. The first

kind of ideal types are rooted in the historical particularities namely, Western city, the Protestant ethics etc. In reality, this kind of ideal types refer to the phenomena that appear only in the specific historical periods and in particular cultural areas. The second kind relates to the abstract elements of social reality, for example, the concepts of bureaucracy or feudalism. These elements of social reality are found in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. The third kind of ideal type relates to the reconstruction of a particular kind of behaviour (Cosser 1977: 224). In the following subsections we shall be dealing with each of these kinds of ideal types.

#### **14.4.0 Ideal Types of Historical Particulars**

According to Weber capitalism has been fully realised in modern western societies. Weber constructs an ideal type of capitalism by selecting a certain number of traits from the historical whole to constitute an intelligible entity. This was to show that there was a spiritual affinity between Calvinism and the economic ethics of modern capitalist activity. For this he identified those components of Calvinist doctrine which he considered as of particular and significant importance in the formation of capitalist spirit.

The essence of capitalism according to Weber is embodied in that enterprise whose aim is to make maximum profit or to accumulate more and more. These are based on the rational organisation of work and production. It is the conjunction of desire for profit and rational discipline which constitutes the historically unique feature of western capitalism. The desire for profit is satisfied not by speculation or conquest or adventure, but by discipline and rationality. This is possible with the help of legal administration of the modern state or rational bureaucracy. Hence capitalism is defined as an enterprise working towards unlimited accumulation of profit and functioning according to bureaucratic rationality.

Weber tried to show that there was a close affinity between this type of economic activity and elements of Calvinist doctrine. According to the Calvinist ethic, God is all powerful and above common man. Man has to work for God's glory on earth and this can be done through hardwork and labour which are rational, regular and constant. The calling of the individual is to fulfil his duty to God through the moral conduct of his day to day life whether he is rich or poor. For him work is worship and there is no room for idleness and laziness. This specific character of Calvinistic belief accounted for the relation between Calvinist doctrine and the spirit of capitalism which was characterised by a unique devotion to the earning of wealth through legitimate economic activity. This is rooted in a belief in the value of efficient performance in the chosen vocation as a duty and a virtue.

The affinity between the two and the emergence of Capitalist economic regime as defined by Weber existed only in the west, which made it a historically unique phenomenon. In Calvinist ethic, religious and economic activities are combined in a way not found either in Catholicism or in any other world religion like Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Judaism and Buddhism of which Weber made a comparative analysis.

### 14.4.1 Abstract Elements of Social Reality

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

#### Box 14.I

##### Bureaucracy

General meaning of the term bureaucracy is the rule by departmental or administrative officials following inflexible procedures. Max Weber emphasised the indispensability of bureaucracy for the rational attainment of the goals of any organisation in industrial society (Mitchel 1967: 21)

#### i) Bureaucracy

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

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

#### ii) Types of Authority

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

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

These three ideal type of concepts may be used to understand concrete political regimes, most of which contain certain elements of each (for more detail see Unit 16).



### iii) Types of Action

According to Max Weber “Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its cause and effects”. Here we can point out the following important elements of social action

- i) social action includes all human behaviour.
- ii) social action attaches a subjective meaning to it.
- iii) the acting individual or individuals take into account the behaviour of others.
- iv) social action is oriented in its course.

Hence the construction of a pure type of social action helps the sociologists as an ideal type “which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity” (Weber 1964: 128-129).

#### Box 14.2

##### Social Action

It denotes social behaviour. This concept is used both by social psychologists and sociologists. Many social scientists regarded social action as the proper unit of, observation in the social sciences. Action is social when the actor behaves in such a manner that his action is intended to influence the action of one or more other persons. In sociology it was Max Weber who first explicitly used and emphasised social action as the basis for sociological theory (Mitchel 1968: 2).

Weber has talked about four types of social actions. These are i) Zweckrational or rational action with reference to goals, ii) Wertrational or rational action with reference to values, iii) traditional action and iv) affective action. These are classified according to their modes of orientation. Rational action with reference to goals is classified in terms of the conditions or means for the successful attainment of the actor’s own rationally chosen ends. Rational action with reference to value is classified in terms of rational orientation to an absolute value, that is, action which is directed to overriding ideals of duty, honour or devotion to a cause. Traditional action type is classified as one which is under the influence of long practice, customs and habits. Affective action is classified in terms of affectual orientation, especially emotional, determined by the specific states of feeling of the actor. Since reality presents a mixture of the four pure types of action, for our analysis and understanding we separate them analytically into pure or ideal types. For instance, the use of rational ideal types can help in measuring irrational deviation and we can understand particular empirical action by interpreting as to which of the four types of action it most closely approximates.

In order to understand better the types of action, identified by Max Weber, it is a good idea now to complete Activity 2.

**Activity 2**

List two examples from your day-to-day life for each of the four types of action identified by Max Weber. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

**14.4.2 Reconstruction of a Particular Kind of Behaviour**

This ideal type includes those elements that constitute rationalising reconstructions of a particular kind of behaviour. For example, according to Weber, all propositions in economic theory are merely ideal typical reconstructions of the ways people would behave if they were pure economic subjects. These include laws of supply and demand, marginal utilities etc. Supply of commodity in the market governs prices in relation to demand. Similarly, utility of a commodity for consumption is higher or lower depending upon the units available for consumption. Economic theory rigorously conceives economic behaviour as consistent with its essence. This essence is often defined in a precise manner (Weber 1964: 210). It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) In what sense Weber used the concept of ideal type to show the relationship between Calvinist ethic and the spirit of capitalism? Use four lines to answer.

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ii) What are the major characteristics of ideal type of bureaucracy as outlined by Max Weber? Use five lines to answer.

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iii) What are the four ideal types of social actions stated by Max Weber. Answer in about eight lines.

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## 14.5 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 14.6 KEYWORDS

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### **Affective Action**

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

### **Authority**

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

### **Bureaucracy**

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

### **Calvinism**

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

### **Capitalism**

An economic organisation which consists of private ownership of property, control of

capital, has market mechanism and provision of workers and which aims at making maximum profit.

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

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

**Protestant Ethic** A doctrine of Christianity which provided much of the cultural content of capitalism like individualism, achievement motivation, hostility to inherited wealth and luxury, emphasis on work and profit, opposition to magic and superstition and commitment to rational organisation.

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## 14.7 FURTHER READING

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Aron, R. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2. Penguin Books: London, pp 193-210

Bendix, R. 1960. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Anchor: New York

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## 14.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) c.
- iii) a) False
  - b) True
  - c) True
  - d) False
  - e) False
  - f) True

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Ideal types are constructed by selecting those characteristics or elements of an object of study, which are considered essential or typical to it.
- ii) Ideal types are formulated, first, to understand and analyse a particular social phenomenon or problem; secondly, to avoid confusion or obscurity in the concepts used and thirdly, to increase the precision and accuracy of the analysis.

### Check Your Progress 3

### Ideal Types

- i) Weber constructed ideal type of capitalism and identified those components of Protestant ethic which he thought were of significant importance in the formation of capitalist spirit and was responsible for the rise of modern capitalism in the West.
- ii) According to Max Weber the ideal typical characteristics of bureaucracy are: division of labour and specialisation, work distributed as official duties, hierarchy or offices with clearly defined areas of command and responsibility, formal body of rules to govern, written documents, impersonal relations, recruitment on the basis of merit, separation of private and official income, promotion and fixed salary.
- iv) Max Weber has talked about four types of social actions. These are as follows:
  - a) Rational Action with reference to Goal — e.g. the action of the collector who makes preparation for the coming election.
  - b) Rational Action with reference to value — e.g. the action of the soldier who risks his life for one's country.
  - c) Affective Action — e.g. the abuses given by the bowler to the empire in a cricket match for not giving the batsperson out.
  - d) Traditional Action — e.g. the action of taking bath by an individual after coming from the cremation ground.

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## UNIT 15 RELIGION AND ECONOMY

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### Structure

15.0 Objectives

15.1 Introduction

15.2 Religion and Economy — Meaning and Inter-relationship

15.2.0 Religion

15.2.1 Economy

15.2.2 Inter-relationship between Religious Ethics and Economy

15.3 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

15.3.0 The Spirit of Capitalism

15.3.1 The Protestant Ethic: Features Influencing the Development of Capitalism

15.3.2 Main features of Calvinism

15.3.3 Beliefs of those following Calvinism

15.4 Weber's Comparative Studies on Religion

15.4.0 Confucianism in China

15.4.1 Judaism in West Asia

15.4.2 Hinduism in India

15.5 Critical Evaluation of Weber's Studies on Religion and Economy

15.6 Let Us Sum Up

15.7 Keywords

15.8 Further Reading

15.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 15.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to

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

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### 15.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units, you have studied Weber's concept of ideal type. In this unit you will see the application of this idea in Weber's analysis of religion and economy.

The unit starts by clarifying the meaning of the terms ‘religion’ and ‘economy’. It then goes on to examine the inter-relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity.

To bring out the inter-relationship clearly, there is discussion of the major argument in Max Weber’s famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Next the unit goes into what Weber meant by the “spirit of capitalism” and contrasts it with “traditionalism”. We then discuss certain aspects of the “Protestant ethic” which according to Weber, contributed to the development of capitalism in the West.

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

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## 15.2 RELIGION AND ECONOMY — MEANING AND INTER-RELATIONSHIP

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In this section there is brief discussion of what is meant by the terms religion and economy. After defining these two terms, the following sub-section (15.2.2) provides preliminary ideas about the relationship between religion and economy as formulated by Weber.

### 15.2.0 Religion

The term ‘religion’ refers to a set of ideas and beliefs about the “supernatural” and its impact on the lives of human beings. Human beings have always been confronted with certain problems and crises, which seem to defy logical explanation.

Why is it that a loved one dies? Why does a good man suffer and an evil one prosper? Why do natural calamities happen? Religious beliefs provide supernatural answers to these difficult questions. For instance, suffering may be explained by saying that it is “God’s way” of testing a man’s faith or that it is a punishment for sins committed in past lives. Religious beliefs give meaning to life. They help answer questions about oneself and the world one lives in. They provide certain guidelines of behaviour, certain codes of conduct which individuals are expected to follow.

### 15.2.1 Economy

What do we mean by ‘economy’? In order that society may survive, certain basic physical needs have to be met. Food, clothing and shelter are essential for life. The economy or economic system refers to those arrangements made by society for the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services.

What is to be produced? How much of it is to be produced? How are goods made available to those who want them? How is work to be divided? These are some of the concerns of the economic system.

### 15.2.2 Inter-relationship between Religious Ethics and Economy

This is a brief outline of the meaning of religion and economy. Superficially, they seem poles apart. Religion concerns itself with the beyond, whereas economy deals with the practical business of working, producing and consuming. Are these two seemingly diverse systems related?

Max Weber thought so. According to him, it was the ideas, beliefs, values and world-view of human societies that guided the way their members acted, even in the economic sphere. As has already been mentioned, religion prescribes certain guidelines of behaviour. It is in accordance with these guidelines that followers direct or orient their activities. These guidelines are incorporated in the body of religious ethics of each religious system. Let us illustrate Weber’s view with an example from our society.

A health expert might suggest that if Indians would eat beef, the problem of hunger and malnutrition might be lessened. But the very idea of cow-slaughter is revolting to most Hindus and would probably be rejected outright. So even though cow-slaughter may seem economically rational or logical, values and ideas (in this case, the idea that the cow is sacred) definitely influence the making of certain decisions. It is our beliefs and values, which help to shape our behaviour. It was this link between religious beliefs and economic behaviour that Weber tried to bring out in his work. In order not to confuse religion with ethics, see Box 15.1 to learn about ethics and ethical behaviour.

**Box 15.1**

**Ethic**

The term “ethic” is not restricted to religion alone. You can speak of business ethics, political ethics and so on. Ethics is related to social structure because it affects in some way the social behaviour of individuals in society. Ethics is important because it sets certain standards of thought and behaviour, which are used to evaluate or judge actual behaviour. Ethical codes, in other words, represent what “ought” to be done. They reflect the particular values and beliefs of the social groups of which they are part.

According to Max Weber, there were certain affinities between the Protestant religious ethics and the economic system known as capitalism. These affinities, said Weber, helped capitalism to grow in the western world.

The next section (15.3), describes the major argument contained in Weber’s thesis.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) What is meant by “religion”? Answer in three lines.

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.....  
.....



- ii) Mention two functions of religion.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
- ii) Describe, in two lines, how religious beliefs affect economic behaviour.
  - .....
  - .....

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### 15.3 THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

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Weber located a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Western capitalism, according to Weber, assumed its shape because it was supported by a certain belief system, namely, the “Protestant ethic”. Weber argued that the Protestant ethic is closely associated with the spirit of capitalism. In order to bring out this inter-relationship, Weber constructed ideal types of both, the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Let us now understand what Weber meant by the term ‘the spirit of capitalism’.

#### 15.3.0 The Spirit of Capitalism

Why do people work? Most of us would answer, “to earn money, of course”, in order to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves and our families. We also earn so that we may have certain comforts and luxuries, which make life more enjoyable.

The desire for wealth or profit is as old as human history. Wealth has long been regarded as a symbol of power, status and prestige. But never before in human history did the desire for wealth assume the organised and disciplined form that it did in modern or rational capitalism. It is this rational capitalism that Weber wanted to study. He distinguishes between traditional or adventurist capitalism of former times and rational capitalism of modern times (see Box 15.2).

**Box 15.2**

**Traditional Capitalism and Rational Capitalism**

Traditional or adventurist capitalism existed at many times and many places. It was particularly noticeable in the Italian cities. Traditional capitalism was a risky business, involving the import of luxury items from distant places. Foreign silks, spices, ivory etc. were sold to buyers at exorbitant prices. The aim was to extract as much profit as possible because no one knew when and where the next business deal would occur. It was thus a series of one-shot deals. Rational capitalism on the other hand depends on mass production and distribution of goods. This became possible with the Industrial Revolution and factory

production. What is important is to note that rational capitalism does not deal with a few luxury items but with almost all the daily material requirements from bread to cloth to cars. Rational capitalism is constantly expanding and looking for new methods, new inventions, new products and new customers. Involving methodical work and regularised transactions, it is thus qualitatively and quantitatively different from traditional capitalism.

According to Weber, the capitalists desired wealth not for enjoyment or luxurious living. They wanted it so that they could use it to make more wealth. The thirst for money-making for its own sake is the very essence of modern capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system which aims at the unlimited **accumulation** of profit through the rational organisation of production.

Capitalism arose in the Western nations like England and Germany, which experienced what we call the “**Industrial Revolution**”. The growth of the factory system, new techniques of production, new tools and machines made it possible for the capitalists or the owners to earn vast amounts of money. The production process had to be rationally organised; in other words, efficiency and discipline were essential.

The worker was a means to an end, the end being profit. The attitude towards work was that it should be done well not because one had to do it, but because it carried an intrinsic reward. The popular American saying, “Anything that’s worth doing is worth doing well”, sums up this attitude. Hard work and efficient work was an end in itself.

Weber contrasted this work-ethic with another type which he termed traditionalism.

Here, workers prefer less work to more pay, relaxation to exertion. They are either unable or unwilling to take up new work-methods and techniques.

As has been mentioned before, in capitalism, the worker is regarded by the capitalist as a means to an end. But under traditionalism, the worker-employer relationship is informal, direct and personal.

Traditionalism hampers the growth of capitalism. Capitalism stresses individualism, innovation and the relentless pursuit of profit. Traditionalism, as described above, is characterised by a much less disciplined and efficient system of production. You have just seen that the spirit of capitalism is a work-ethic which calls for accumulation of wealth for its own sake. To do so, work has to be organised in an efficient, disciplined manner. Hard work is a virtue that carries intrinsic rewards.

Unlike “traditionalism”, the spirit of capitalism demands individualism, innovation, hard work and the pursuit of wealth for its own sake. It is thus an economic ethic unlike any in the past.

Let us now try to understand what Weber meant by the Protestant ethic, in other words, the major tenets or principles of the Protestant religion. But before doing so, just complete Check Your Progress 2.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Tick the correct answer.

The essence of capitalism according to Weber is that

- a) capitalists exploit workers.
- b) capitalists aim to increase profit so that they can lead a luxurious life.
- c) making money is an end in itself.
- d) all of the above.

ii) Tick the correct answer.

Capitalism arose when the western nations went through

- a) the French revolution.
- b) the Green revolution.
- c) the Industrial revolution.
- d) none of the above.

iii) Tick the correct answer.

“Rational Organization” of production requires

- a) efficiancy, discipline and hard work.
- b) Less work and more pay for workers.
- c) large amounts of money.
- d) all of the above.

iv) Place the following items, under the correct heading.

- a) informal relationship with owner
- b) work as an end in itself
- c) innovation and individualism
- d) resistance to change
- e) worker as a means to an end
- f) unlimited pursuit of profit

Traditionalism	Capitalism

15.3.2 The Protestant Ethic: Features Influencing the Development of Capitalism

Let us first clarify a few historical details. What is Protestantism? As the name suggests, it is a religion of protest. It arose in the sixteenth century in Europe in the period known as the Reformation.

Its founding fathers like Martin Luther and John Calvin broke away from the Catholic Church. They felt that the Church had become too immersed in doctrines and rituals. It had lost touch with the common people. Greed,

corruption and vice had gripped the Church. Priests had a life-style more suitable for princes.

The Protestant sects that sprang up all over Europe tried to recapture the lost spirit of the Church. They stressed simplicity, austerity and devotion. Calvinism founded by the Frenchman John Calvin was one such sect. The followers of Calvin in England were known as the Puritans. They migrated to the continent of North America and were the founders of the American nation. Weber observed that in the West, it was by and large the Protestants who had made greatest progress in education and employment. They were the top bureaucrats, the most skilled technical workers and the leading industrialists.

Was there something in their religion that inspired them to make such progress? Weber thought so, and attempted to prove it. The brand of capitalism that Weber was most interested in was Calvinism. An examination of its main features would show us how there is the link between religion and economy.

### **15.3.3 Main Features of Calvinism**

As said before, for showing the link between religion and economy or in this particular case between the spirit of Capitalism and Calvinism, let us first discuss the main features of Calvinism.

#### **Calvin's Image of God**

God, said Calvin, was all powerful, transcendent. His Divine Will was unknowable. It would be foolish of any human being to try to understand God's Will. It could not be understood simply because it was God's Will!

#### **Doctrine of Pre-destination**

At the core of Calvinism is the belief that certain persons are chosen or 'elected' by God to enter Heaven while the rest are damned. The 'chosen' will reach Heaven no matter what they do on Earth. We cannot bribe God to give us a place in Heaven through prayers or sacrifice. As this Will is unknowable, we cannot change it. Imagine the insecurity of the followers of this stern religion! He did not know whether he was elected or damned. They could not turn to a priest for solace and help because no mortal man could understand God. What could they do to cope with the anxiety of an uncertain destiny? How could they prove to themselves that they were the chosen ones?

They could do so by prospering on Earth. Their material prosperity would be the symbol or token of their election. He would work for the glory of God.

#### **Calvinism and "this-worldly asceticism"**

By 'asceticism' we mean strict self-discipline, control and conquest of desires. In Protestantism, particularly Calvinism Weber detected this-worldly asceticism. It stressed rigorous self-discipline in order to master the environment. A simple, frugal life-style was recommended along with hard work. Worldly or sensual pleasures were viewed with horror; fine clothes, dance and music, theatre and novels came from the Devil as they would

divert a person from working for the glory of God. Even the very human expression of laughter was frowned upon!

This emphasis on hard work was not confined to Calvinists alone. It was a common feature of all Protestant sects. The idea that ‘honesty is the best policy’ was the principle of early capitalism. Weber (1948:313) gives us the example of the ‘Methodists’ a sect who forbade their followers

- a) to haggle when buying and selling.
- b) to trade with commodities without paying the necessary taxes and tariffs.
- c) to charge rates of interest higher than the law of the country permits.
- d) ‘to gather treasures on earth’ (meaning the transformation of investment capital into ‘funded wealth’).
- e) to borrow without being sure of one’s ability to pay back the debt.
- f) “luxuries of all sorts”.

The fruits of hard labour could not be spent on worldly pleasures. Thus there was only one outlet for money. It was reinvested and hence used to make more money.

Not a moment was to be idled away as “work is worship” and “time is money”.

See Figure 15.1: Spirit of Capitalism that illustrates the ideas mentioned above.



Figure 15.1: Spirit of Capitalism

### The notion of “calling”

Would a University graduate accept a sweeper’s job? Probably not. Most of us would consider the job of a sweeper or garbage-collector too “low”

or too “dirty” for us. The Calvinist ethic, on the other hand, holds that all work is important and sacred. It is not mere work, it is a calling or a mission and should be performed with devotion and sincerity.

At this point let us complete Activity 1 that deals with some of the point discussed in sub-section 15.3.2.

**Activity 1**

Write two page note on any religious sect in India in terms of its guidelines for shaping one’s day-to-day behaviour. Compare your note, with those of other students at your study centre.

We have so far looked at how Weber described the strong relationship between the spiritual vision of the world and a certain style of economic activity. This relationship is conspicuous among the Calvinists. Weber summarised the Calvinist ethic in five points (Aron 1967: 221-222).

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

This helped to create a disciplined and dedicated workforce without which capitalism could not have emerged.

Hard work, saving and re-investment and the desire to prosper have a strong affinity with the “spirit of capitalism” which you read about earlier in sub section 15.3.0.

Let us see the link that Weber was trying to establish. Ideas impinge upon or affect human conduct and human conduct can be understood in the context of the ideas lying behind it. Working day and night and not enjoying the fruits of that labour might seem very irrational to most of us. But if we keep in mind the doctrine of “pre-destination” and the need to prosper to prove one’s “election” by God, this irrational behaviour makes sense. As we have earlier stated, religious beliefs set guidelines for action, they motivate us to behave in a certain manner.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Why did Max Weber try to establish a link between the Protestant ethic and capitalism? Answer in about five lines.

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ii) Why did the followers of Calvin stress so much on hard work? Answer in about four lines.

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

iii) Why no work was regarded as “low” by the Calvinists? Answer in about four lines.

.....  
.....  
.....  
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## 15.4 WEBER’S COMPARATIVE STUDIES ON RELIGION

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You have just studied the link that Weber tries to establish between religious ethics on the one hand and economic behaviour on the other. Let us now see how Weber further tries to substantiate or validate this idea with the help of comparative studies of various world religions. In this section, we shall describe Weber’s studies of Confucianism in ancient China, Hinduism in ancient India and Judaism in ancient Palestine (West Asia).

### 15.4.0 Confucianism in China

Ancient China had a well-developed economy. Trade, commerce, finance and manufacture were quite advanced. Despite the presence of these material conditions, Western-style of capitalism did not develop there. Why? According to Weber, the Confucian ethic would not permit this. Confucian ideas can be summed up as follows.

- i) Belief in the order of the Universe, the cosmos.
- ii) Man should aim at being in harmony with nature and the cosmos.
- iii) Behaviour is to be guided by tradition. All wisdom lies in the past.
- iv) Family and kin ties and obligations were never to be neglected.

The stress on harmony, traditionalism and family obligations are quite contradictory to the relentless pursuit of profit for its own sake. Indeed,

the “spirit of capitalism” would probably have been considered to be bad manners.

### 15.4.1 Judaism in West Asia

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

Judaism, says Weber, could have generated the “spirit of capitalism”. However, certain historical forces prevented this. The **Exodus** or mass migration of the Jews from their homeland due to persecution left them scattered all over the world.

Their economic participation was restricted to money-lending, which they did very successfully.

### 15.4.2 Hinduism in India

While dealing with the Religion of India Weber expressed a strict negative attitude towards the possibility of rational capitalism existing within the ethos of Hinduism. To him, it is extremely unlikely that the organisation of modern capitalism could have originated in a caste-based society like India. Nor could capitalism imported from the West hope to flourish in India.

India like China was economically fairly advanced. You probably know that ancient India made valuable contributions to science. Manufactured goods found world-wide markets and trade links were established in various parts of the world.

But Hinduism, says Weber, did not provide a suitable ethic for the development of capitalism. The ideas of “*Karma*”, “*dharma*” and “*punarjanma*” (the cycle of births and rebirths) made Indians defeatists, fatalists. You have probably heard the statement “I am being punished for my deeds in my last life”. Since one’s present condition is believed to be the consequence of past deeds, Weber feels that Hindus have no motivation to improve their economic condition. Hindus, says Weber, would not consider it worthwhile to put in the sort of hard work that capitalism demanded.

The Hindu ideal of “*moksha*” or salvation states that our souls can be liberated only when we empty ourselves of worldly desires or “*vasana*”. The material world is an illusion or “*maya*”. True bliss is ours when we free ourselves from this web of desires or “*maya-jaal*”. Hinduism preaches “other-worldly asceticism”. The material world is de-emphasised. Material prosperity is not given importance, as it is temporary and illusory.

It is welfare of the spirit or soul or “*atma*” which is imperishable that is more important. Religions that place more stress on otherworldly asceticism



and de-emphasise the material world can hardly foster attitudes that promote capitalism.

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

Before reading about critical evaluation of Weber's studies on religion and economy, complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

You must have seen the popular tele-serial Mahabharata. How is the Hindu ethic depicted in this serial? To what extent does it differ from the 'Hindu ethic' as described by Weber? Write down your observation in about two pages. Compare your note, if possible, with your co-learners at the Study Centre.

## 15.5 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF WEBER'S STUDIES ON RELIGION AND ECONOMY

Weber's work on religion and economy has often been subjected to criticism. Some scholars feel that he has concentrated very selectively on certain aspects of religious ethics and interpreted them very narrowly so that they may fit in with his theory.

For instance, in his studies on the Hindu ethic, Weber has seen only one aspect of the Hindu ethic and has over-emphasised the fatalistic and passive aspect of it. Some scholars and students would argue that the notions of "karma" and "dharma" actually spur individuals to act, to perform their duties, to live up to their obligations. It is pointed out that the concept of calling which forms the very foundation of the spirit of capitalism is also prevalent in Hinduism. The principle in the Bhagwad Gita of doing one's duty without thinking of benefit is similar to the doctrine of calling which is the focal point of material progress in West.

Milton Singer has presented a functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic in India in his study of the leading industrialists of the city of Madras. To him caste background and tradition may equally be fitted for the industrial development in India. Caste based division of labour has been used successfully in the specialisation of industrial workers. Singer observed that through the process of "compartmentalisation", many industrialists kept their business obligations and ritual obligations separate or in distinct compartments. Hence there was no conflict between an individual's role as a businessman, on the one hand, and a religious person on the other.

According to Milton Singer (1969) if capitalism is to be developed in India then it must not be an aping of the west that destroys the traditional way

of life. Capitalism in India can rather develop within the given cultural norms and institutions of our society.

Now at the end of the unit on Religion and economy, you need to complete Check Your Progress 4.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) Confucianism stressed on
  - a) individualism
  - b) harmony with the universe
  - c) fatalism and passiveness.
- ii) According to Weber, Hindus were not motivated to work hard because
  - a) their religion made them silently accept their fate
  - b) their technology and manufacture were well developed
  - c) they were lazy.
- iii) Capitalism did not develop in ancient Palestine because
  - a) Judaism stressed “other-worldly asceticism”
  - b) the Jews were dispersed all over the world
  - c) Jewish prophets preached mastery over the environment.

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### 15.6 LET US SUM UP

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

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### 15.7 KEYWORDS

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#### Catholic Church

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

#### Capital Accumulation

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

**Exodus**

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

**Religion and Economy****Industrial Revolution**

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

**Reformation**

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

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**15.8 FURTHER READING**

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Aron, Raymond 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2, Penguin Books: London pp. 210-237.

Haralambos, M. 1980. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. Oxford University Press: London.

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**15.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) By 'religion', we mean certain ideas and beliefs about the 'supernatural' or those phenomena that defy explanation. Religion refers to certain values, ideas and guidelines of behaviour that help people to understand themselves and the world around them.
- ii)
  - a) Religion helps man to come to terms with events beyond his control.
  - b) It provides certain guidelines of behaviour that help followers to orient or direct their activities.
- iii) Religious beliefs prescribe certain values which followers are expected to adhere to or stick to. Thus economic behaviour is shaped by the values or guidelines provided by the religious system of a society.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) c)
- ii) c)
- iii) a)

**Max Weber**

**iv) TRADITIONALISM**

**CAPITALISM**

(a)

(b)

(d)

(c)

(e)

(f)

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Max Weber observed that in Europe, it was the Protestant community that had made great progress in the economic field. They were the leaders in industry, education and bureaucracy. Weber tried to see whether it was their religion that contributed to their success. Thus he tried to see if there was a link between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.
- ii) The Calvinist teachings said that people were pre-destined to be saved or damned. The Calvinists tried to prove to themselves that they were chosen or elected to be saved by prospering on earth. The only way they could prosper was by working hard and saving. Hence they stressed on hard work and discipline.
- iii) The Calvinists regarded work as a calling or a mission. It was to be performed with utmost sincerity and devotion. Work carried intrinsic rewards, it was to be done for its own sake. Work is worship, hence no job was regarded as low or dirty.

**Check Your Progress 4**

i) b)

ii) b)

iii) b)

### Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Concepts of Power and Authority
  - 16.2.0 Power
  - 16.2.1 Authority
  - 16.2.2 Elements of Authority
- 16.3 Types of Social Action and Types of Authority
  - 16.3.0 Types of Social Action
  - 16.3.1 Types of Authority
    - 16.3.1.0 Traditional Authority
    - 16.3.1.1 Charismatic Authority
    - 16.3.1.2 Rational-Legal Authority
  - 16.3.2 Lack of Conformity between Typologies
- 16.4 Bureaucracy
  - 16.4.0 Major Features of Bureaucracy
  - 16.4.1 Characteristics of Officials in Bureaucracy
- 16.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.6 Keywords
- 16.7 Further Readings
- 16.8 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

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### 16.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to

- understand the concepts of power and authority as explained by Max Weber
- show the connections between Weber's types of social action and types of authority
- describe in detail the three types of authority namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal
- describe bureaucracy as the instrument for the operation of rational-legal authority.

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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In units 14 and 15 of this block you read about Weber's views on the **ideal type** and the link between religion and economy. In this unit, you will find some of Weber's important contributions in understanding **power** and **authority**. In the first section (16.2), there is a brief discussion of the

sociological concepts of power and authority with special reference to Weber's understanding of the terms. The second section (16.3) will mention the types of social action that Weber identifies and the types of authority that flow from them, namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority. The third section (16.4) will focus on the instrument through which rational-legal authority is exercised, namely, bureaucracy.

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## 16.2 POWER AND AUTHORITY

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Let us now examine the key concepts of power and authority, both, in the general sociological sense as well as in the specific Weberian context.

### 16.2.0 Power

In ordinary usage, the term 'power' means strength or the capacity to control. Sociologists describe it as the ability of an individual or group to fulfil its desires and implement its decisions and ideas. It involves the ability to influence and/ or control the behaviour of others even against their will.

For Max Weber, power is an aspect of social relationships. It refers to the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another person. Power is present in social interaction and creates situations of inequality since the one who has power imposes it on others. The impact of power varies from situation to situation. On the one hand, it depends on the capacity of the powerful individual to exercise power. On the other hand it depends upon the extent to which it is opposed or resisted by the others. Weber says that power can be exercised in all walks of life.

It is not restricted to a battlefield or to politics. It is to be observed in the market place, on a lecture platform, at a social gathering, in sports, scientific discussions and even through charity. For example, giving alms or '*daan*' to a beggar is a subtle way of exercising your superior economic power. You can bring a smile of joy to the beggar's face or a feeling of despair by giving or refusing alms.

What are the sources of power? Weber discusses two contrasting sources of power. These are as follows

- a) Power which is derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market. For example, a group of producers of sugar controls supply of their production in the market to maximise their profit.
- b) An established system of authority that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey. For example, in the army, a *jawan* is obliged to obey the command of his officer. The officer derives his power through an established system of authority.

As you have seen in the last point, any discussion of power leads us to think about its legitimacy. It is legitimacy, which according to Weber constitutes the core point of authority. Let us now examine the concept of authority.

### 16.2.1 Authority

The German word “Herrschaft”, used by Weber, has been variously translated. Some sociologists term it as ‘authority’, others as ‘domination’ or ‘command’. Herrschaft is a situation in which a ‘Herr’ or master dominates or commands others. Raymond Aron (1967: 187) defines Herrschaft as the master’s ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him. In this unit, Weber’s concept of Herrschaft will denote the term “authority”.

A question may be raised, namely, what is the difference between power and authority? Power, as you have seen, refers to the ability or capacity to control another. Authority refers to legitimised power. It means that the master has the right to command and can expect to be obeyed.

Let us now see the elements that constitute authority.

### 16.2.3 Elements of Authority

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

- i) An individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters.
- ii) An individual/group that is ruled.
- iii) The will of the ruler to influence the conduct of the ruled which may be expressed through commands.
- iv) Evidence of the influence of the rulers in terms of compliance or obedience shown by the ruled.
- v) Direct or indirect evidence which shows that the ruled have internalised and accepted the fact that the ruler’s commands must be obeyed.

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

It is time to complete Activity 1 and Check Your Progress 1.

**Activity 1**  
 Give example of at least five authority from your daily life. What are the elements involved in them? Prepare a note of one page on them. Exchange your note, if possible, with the co-learners at your Study Centre.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) In one line define the concept of power.  
 .....
- ii) Describe, in about three lines, two important sources of power.  
 .....  
 .....

iii) Point out, in three lines three important elements of authority.

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

Let us now examine the types of authority identified by Weber. Before we do so, it is very important to study his typology of social action. The types of authority Weber discusses are, as you will soon see, closely linked with the types of social action.

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### 16.3 TYPES OF SOCIAL ACTION AND TYPES OF AUTHORITY

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In sub-section 14.4.1(iii) of unit 14 we discussed the Weberian concept of social action. Max Weber describes sociology as a comprehensive science of social action (Aron, 1967: 187). He presents a typology of social action, which we will now briefly discuss.

#### 16.3.0 Types of Social Action

Weber identifies four distinct types of social action. They are

i) **Zweckrational action or rational action in relation to a goal**

An example of this is an engineer constructing a bridge, who uses certain materials in a certain manner to achieve goal. This activity is directed towards obtaining that goal, namely, completing the construction.

ii) **Wertrational action, or rational action in relation to a value**

Here, one may give the example of a soldier laying down his life for the country. His action is not directed towards attaining specific material goal like wealth. It is for the sake of certain values like honour and patriotism.

iii) **Affective action**

This kind of action results from the emotional state of mind of the actor. If some one is teasing a girl in a bus, she may get so irritated that she may slap the offending person. She has been provoked so much that she has reacted violently.

iv) **Traditional action**

This is an action, which is guided by customs and longstanding beliefs, which become second nature or habit. In traditional Indian society, doing '*pranam*' or '*namaskar*' to elders is almost second nature needing no prompting.

One may find that the above typology of social action is reflected in Weber's classification of types of authority. We will discuss this in the following sub-section (16.3.2).



### 16.3.1 Types of Authority

As you have already read in sub-section 16.2.1, authority implies legitimacy. According to Weber, there are three systems of legitimation, each with its corresponding norms, which justify the power to command. It is these systems of legitimation which are designated as the following types of authority.

- (i) Traditional authority
- (ii) Charismatic authority
- (iii) Rational-legal authority



Fig. 16.1 Types of Authority

Let us describe each of these types in some detail.

#### 16.3.1.0 Traditional Authority

This system of legitimation flows from traditional action. In other words, it is based on customary law and the sanctity of ancient traditions. It is based on the belief that a certain authority is to be respected because it has existed since time immemorial.

In traditional authority, rulers enjoy personal authority by virtue of their inherited status. Their commands are in accordance with customs and they also possess the right to extract compliance from the ruled. Often, they abuse their power. The persons who obey them are 'subjects' in the fullest sense of the term. They obey their master out of personal loyalty or a pious regard for his time-honoured status. Let us take an example from our own society. You are familiar with the caste system in India. Why did the 'lower' castes bear the atrocities inflicted by the 'upper' castes for centuries? One way of explaining this is because the authority of the 'upper' castes had the backing of tradition and antiquity. The 'lower' castes some say had become socialised into accepting their oppression. Thus, we can see that traditional authority is based on the belief in the sacred quality of

long-standing traditions. This gives legitimacy to those who exercise authority.

Traditional authority does not function through written rules or laws. It is transmitted by inheritance down the generations. Traditional authority is carried out with the help of relatives and personal favourites.

In modern times, the incidence of traditional authority has declined. Monarchy, the classic example of traditional authority still exists, but in a highly diluted form. The Queen of England is a traditional figure of authority but as you may be aware, she does not actually exercise her authority. The laws of the land are enacted in her name, but their content is decided by the legislators, the representatives of the people. The queen has a parliament, which governs the kingdom, but she does not appoint ministers. She is a nominal head of state.

Briefly, traditional authority derives its legitimacy from longstanding traditions, which enable some to command and compel others to obey. It is hereditary authority and does not require written rules. The 'masters' exercise their authority with the help of loyal relatives and friends. Weber considers this kind of authority as irrational. It is therefore rarely found in modern developed societies.

### 16.3.1.1 Charismatic Authority

Charisma means an extraordinary quality possessed by some individuals (see Box 16.1). This gives such people unique powers to capture the fancy and devotion of ordinary people. Charismatic authority is based on extraordinary devotion to an individual and to the way of life preached by this person. The legitimacy of such authority rests upon the belief in the supernatural or magical powers of the person. The charismatic leader 'proves' his/her power through miracles, military and other victories or the dramatic prosperity of the disciples. As long as charismatic leaders continue to 'prove' their miraculous powers in the eyes of their disciples, their authority stays intact. You may have realised that the type of social action that charismatic authority is related to is affective action. The disciples are in a highly charged emotional state as a result of the teachings and appeal of the charismatic leaders. They worship their hero.

#### Box 16.1

##### Charisma

Dictionary meaning of the term charisma is a divinely inspired gift. It is gift of divine grace. This term is used by Weber to denote "a kind of power over others which is also perceived as authority by those subject to it. the holder of charisma may be a human being, in which case his authority might be interpreted in terms of myth of the divine mission, insight or moral attributes" (see Scruton 1982: 58).

Charismatic authority is not dependent on customary beliefs or written rules. It is purely the result of the special qualities of the leader who governs or rules in his personal capacity. Charismatic authority is not organised; therefore there is no paid staff or administrative set-up. The leader and his

assistants do not have a regular occupation and often reject their family responsibilities. These characteristics sometimes make charismatic leaders revolutionaries, as they have rejected all the conventional social obligations and norms.

Based, as it is, on the personal qualities of an individual, the problem of succession arises with the death or disappearance of the leader. The person who succeeds the leader may not have charismatic powers. In order to transmit the original message of the leader, some sort of organisation develops. The original charisma gets transformed either into traditional authority or rational-legal authority. Weber calls this **routinisation** of charisma.

If the charismatic figure is succeeded by a son/daughter or some close relative, traditional authority results. If, on the other hand, charismatic qualities are identified and written down, then it changes into rational legal authority, where anyone acquiring these qualities can become a leader. Charismatic authority can thus be described as unstable and temporary. We can find examples of charismatic leaders throughout history. Saints, prophets and some political leaders are examples of such authority. Kabir, Nanak, Jesus, Mohammed, Lenin and Mahatma Gandhi, to name a few were charismatic leaders. They were revered by people for their personal qualities and the message they preached, not because they represented traditional or rational-legal authority. Let us now describe the third type of authority identified by Max Weber.

### Box 16.2

#### Routinisation

Weber used routinisation to mean the “transformation of charismatic leadership into institutionalised leadership where one office takes the place of a personality as the focus of authority” (Scruton 1982: 415).

### Check Your Progress 2

i) Tick mark the correct answer.

Which one of the following is not a type of authority according to Weber?

- a) Traditional authority
- b) Rational-legal authority
- c) Charismatic authority
- d) Personal authority

ii) Tick mark the correct answer.

When the original charisma of a leader gets transformed into traditional or rational-legal authority, what does Weber call it?

- a) Routinisation of one's power to capture devotion of ordinary people

- b) Routinisation of legitimacy
  - c) Routinisation of one's ability to lead
  - d) Routinisation of one's capacity to control the behaviour of other's against their will
- iii) Tick mark the correct answer.

Traditional authority derive legitimacy from

- a) Law of the land
- b) Long standing customary law
- c) Outstanding performance of the leader
- d) All of the above.

### 16.3.1.2 Rational-legal Authority

The term refers to a system of authority, which are both, rational and legal. It is vested in a regular administrative staff who operate in accordance with certain written rules and laws. Those who exercise authority are appointed to do so on the basis of their achieved qualifications, which are prescribed and codified. Those in authority consider it a profession and are paid a salary. Thus, it is a rational system.

It is legal because it is in accordance with the laws of the land which people recognise and feel obliged to obey. The people acknowledge and respect the legality of both, the ordinance and rules as well as the positions or titles of those who implement the rules.

Rational-legal authority is a typical feature of modern society. It is the reflection of the process of rationalisation. Remember that Weber considers rationalisation as the key feature of western civilisation. It is, according to Weber, a specific product of human thought and deliberation. By now you have clearly grasped the connection between rational-legal authority and rational action for obtaining goals.

Let us look at examples of rational-legal authority. We obey the tax collector because we believe in the legality of the ordinances he enforces. We also believe that he has the legal right to send us taxation notices. We stop our vehicles when the traffic policeman orders us to do so because we respect the authority vested in him by the law. Modern societies are governed not by individuals, but by laws and ordinances. We obey the policeman because of his position and his uniform which represents the law, not because he is Mr. 'X' or Mr. 'Y'. Rational-legal authority exists not just in the political and administrative spheres, but also in economic organisations like banks and industries as well as in religious and cultural organisations.

### 16.3.2 Lack of Conformity between Typologies

From the above discussion on the types of social action and types of authority one may find that traditional authority corresponds to traditional action, rational-legal authority corresponds to rational action in relation to goal and charismatic authority corresponds to affective action or emotional

action. However one easily finds that Weber distinguishes four types of social action and only three types of authority. The lack of conformity between the typology of social action and the typology of authority is a subject for open discussion.

In order that you might clearly grasp the manner in which rational-legal authority functions it is necessary to examine the institution of 'bureaucracy'. Bureaucracy is the medium through which rational-legal authority is carried out and it is the subject matter of the next section (16.4). Before going to the next section, complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

Give an example of rational-legal or a traditional authority from your own society with special reference to the basis of legitimacy of that authority. Prepare note of one page. Exchange your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at your Study Centre.

## 16.4 BUREAUCRACY

Bureaucracy, as just mentioned, is the machinery, which implements rational-legal authority. Max Weber studied bureaucracy in detail and constructed an ideal type which contained the most prominent characteristics of bureaucracy. Let us examine this ideal type which reveals to us the major features of bureaucracy.

### 16.4.0 Major Features of Bureaucracy

- i) In order that the bureaucracy may function adequately, it relies on the following rules and regulations.
  - a) The activities which comprise bureaucracy are distributed among the officials in the form of official duties.
  - b) There is a stable or regular system by which officials are vested with authority. This authority is strictly delimited by the laws of the land.
  - c) There are strict and methodical procedures which ensure that officials perform their duties adequately.

The above mentioned three characteristics constitute 'bureaucratic authority', which is to be found in developed and modern societies.

- ii) The second feature of bureaucracy is that there is a hierarchy of officials in authority. By this we mean that there is a firmly built structure of subordination and superordination. Lower officials are supervised by higher ones and are answerable to them. The advantage of this system is that governed people can express their dissatisfaction with lower officials by appealing to the higher ones. For instance, if you are dissatisfied with the behaviour or performance of a clerk or a section officer in an office, you can appeal to the higher official to seek redress.

- iii) The management of the bureaucratic office is carried out through written documents or files. They are preserved and properly kept by clerks who are specially appointed for this purpose.
- iv) The work in the bureaucratic office is highly specialised and staff is trained accordingly.
- v) A fully developed bureaucratic office demands the full working capacity of the staff. In such a case, officials may be compelled to work over-time.

Having looked the main features of a bureaucratic set-up, let us now learn something about the officials that you have found repeatedly mentioned above.

### 16.4.1 Characteristics of Officials in Bureaucracy

Weber mentions the following characteristics of officials in a bureaucratic set-up

- i) Office-work is a 'vocation' for officials.
- ii) They are specially trained for their jobs.
- iii) Their qualifications determine their position or rank in the office.
- iv) They are expected to do their work honestly.

Their official positions also have a bearing on their personal lives. Let us see how.

- i) Bureaucratic officials enjoy a high status in society.
- ii) Often, their jobs carry transfer liabilities. By this we mean that they may be transferred from one place or department to another leading to some instability in their professional and personal lives.
- iii) Officials receive salaries not in accordance with productivity but status. The higher their rank, the higher their salaries. They also receive benefits like pension, provident fund, medical and other facilities. Their jobs are considered very secure.
- iv) Officials enjoy good career prospects. They can move from the lower rungs of the bureaucratic ladder to higher ones if they work in a disciplined manner.

It is time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

#### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Bureaucracy is an example of
  - a) traditional authority.
  - b) rational-legal authority.
  - c) charismatic authority.
  - d) none of the above .

ii) Mention in three lines important features of bureaucratic authority.

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

iii) Mention in four lines important characteristics of the officials of bureaucracy.

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

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## 16.5 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 16.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Power</b>	One’s capacity to impose his or her will on others
<b>Authority</b>	When power is legitimised it becomes authority
<b>Ideal type</b>	A methodological tool developed by Weber through which the most commonly found features of a phenomenon are abstracted. Ideal type is an analytical construct with which the social scientist compares existing reality.
<b>Routinisation</b>	A process of transformation of the charismatic authority either into traditional or rational legal authority
<b>Money-economy</b>	Any economic transaction made in terms of money

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## 16.7 FURTHER READING

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Bendix, Reinhard, 1960. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Heinman: London

Freund, Julien 1968. *The Sociology of Max Weber*. Random House: New York

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## 16.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Power is one's capacity to impose his or her will on others.
- ii) Power can be derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market situation. Power can again be derived from an established system of authority that allocates the right to command and duty to obey.
- iii)
  - a) Presence of individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters
  - b) Presence of an individual/group that is ruled
  - c) Evidence of influence of the rulers in terms of compliance and obedience shown by the ruled

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) d)
- ii) a)
- iii) b)

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) b)
- ii) Important features of bureaucratic authority are
  - a) it operates on the principle of jurisdictional area which relies on certain administrative regulations.
  - b) there is a stable regular system by which officials are vested with authority.
  - c) there are strict and methodical procedures which ensure that officials perform their duties adequately.
- iii) Important characteristics of the officials of bureaucracy are that
  - a) office work is a vocation for the official
  - b) officials are especially trained for their job
  - c) their qualifications determine their position or rank in the office, and
  - d) they are expected to do work honestly.



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## UNIT 17 RATIONALITY

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### Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 The Meaning of Rationality and Rationalisation
- 17.3 Weber's Treatment of the concept of Rationality
  - 17.3.0 Protestantism
  - 17.3.1 Capitalism
  - 17.3.2 Bureaucracy
  - 17.3.3 Types of Rationality: 'Zweckrationalitat' and 'Wertrationalitat'
- 17.4 Rationality in Sociological Investigation: Value-free Sociology
- 17.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.6 Keywords
- 17.7 Further Reading
- 17.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 17.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with rationality, a recurrent concept in Weber's work. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- explain the meanings of the terms rationality and rationalisation
- examine Weber's work on rationality with reference to Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy
- discuss Weber's views on rationality in sociological investigation and value-free sociology.

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### 17.1 INTRODUCTION

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The previous units of this Block have made you familiar with some of the important sociological contributions of Max Weber, namely, ideal types the relation between religious ethics and economic behaviour as well as his understanding of power and **authority**. It is now time for us to handle the central theme in his work, namely, the idea of rationality and the process of rationalisation. As this is a concept that touches almost all of Weber's work, you might find parts of this unit repetitive. However, it is a good opportunity for you to revise some concepts learnt earlier as well as study them from the point of view of rationality.

This unit has been divided into three sections. In the first section, you will get a brief description of the meanings of the terms 'rationality' and 'rationalisation'. The second section will highlight how Weber used the

concept of rationality in his work. The issues taken up will be Protestantism, capitalism, bureaucracy and types of rationality. The third and final section will focus on Weber's application of rationality in sociological investigation with special reference to his plea for a **value**-free sociology.

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## 17.2 THE MEANING OF RATIONALITY AND RATIONALISATION

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Rationality refers to those ideas and behaviours which are logically coherent and consistent and amenable to empirical knowledge. Rationalisation refers to the process whereby rationality is applied to various aspects and activities of life. The conviction that rationality is the distinctive characteristic of human beings has made it a central theme in Western philosophy for over two hundred years (Mitchel 1968:142).

According to Weber, the contemporary world is characterised by rationality. Max Weber believed that the key to understand modern society is to be found in its rational features and rationalising forces. For him, the modern Western world is characterised by rationality. As a result of this, human activity is marked by methodical calculation. Quantification, predictability and regularity become important. Individuals rely more on logic, **reason** and calculation than on supernatural beliefs. To Weber rationalisation means that "principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious power existed" (Weber 1946: 139, Cf. Hearn 1985: 76). Let us take an example. If a farmer wants to reap a good harvest, he can spend time, energy and money on conducting *poojas* and prayers. On the other hand, he can utilise the same effort and expense in digging irrigation canals or a tube-well so that his crops may thrive. In the first case, he is dependent on "mysterious incalculable forces"; in the second case he is using rational calculation.

To Weber rationalisation is the product of scientific specialisation and technological differentiation of western culture. He describes rationalisation as striving for perfection, as an ingenious refinement of the conduct of life and the attainment of mastery over the external world (see Freund 1972: 18). Demystification of beliefs and secularisation of thought are important facets of rationalisation which assist in attaining mastery over the world. Rationalisation also involves formalisation of laws and organisations.

As has been mentioned earlier, rationality is a recurrent concept in Weber's work and rationalization is a recurrent theme in the sense of making more rational. His own attempt is to render a rational account of society. Rationality and rationalisation occur several times and in several senses. It could indeed even be argued that the whole body of Weber's work is an exploration of the rationality of social forms and the logic of their changes.

Weber views rationality as a process of rationalisation of social system. This takes place through the emergence of rational organisation and institutions in human society. He also finds the reflection of the process of

rationalisation in human values, beliefs, thoughts and actions. Here he locates the emergence of elements of rationality in social sciences as well.

The rationalisation characteristic of modern societies is manifested in terms of the 'Zweckrational' actions, i.e. actions in relation to goals. Hence the sphere of rationalisation is extended to economic, political, religious organisations etc. Weber makes extensive use of the concept of rationality in his study of social actions, organisations and processes. He also uses it as a mode of scientific investigation. Thus, rationality appears in Weber's work in two broadly distinct, but inter-related ways. Let us see what these are in the next section (17.3).

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill in the blanks with suitable words
  - a) To Weber, rationalisation is the product of scientific ..... and ..... differentiation.
  - b) Rationalisation implies mastery over .....
- ii) State whether the following are True (T) or False (F)
  - a) Rationality means greater reliance on spirits and magic True/False
  - b) Human values and beliefs can never be rationalised. True/False
  - c) Rationalisation can extend to all aspects of society. True/False

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## 17.3 WEBER'S TREATMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

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Weber treated or handled rationality in his work in the following two major ways.

### i) Society as a Rationalisation Process

The first meaning is related to the study of society as a process of rationalisation. That is, an older, less rational form changes into a newer more rational form. This is what he calls rationalisation, i.e. the way in which reason becomes effective in history, the actual historical process.

Weber sees the development of history, and particularly recent history, i.e. the 'modern', as one of increasing rationality and rationalisation. Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy are successive forms of this process of rationalisation. They gain their meaningfulness as part of a historical development, i.e. the way in which a later development is more rational than a former.

### ii) Rationality as a Methodological Tool

The second way of seeing rationality is as a methodological principle, a strategy of inquiry, a method of investigation. It is Weber's aim to

lay bare the logic of various social forms and processes even when they appear at first glance to be irrational, non-rational or anti-rational. In this sense rationality is a mode of inquiry that seek to discover the reason of a social form or development.

In the following sub-sections, let us examine society as a process of rationalisation. Let us consider the rational features of Protestantism, capitalism, bureaucracy and historical social processes.



Figure 17.1 Society and rationality

### 17.3.0 Protestantism

Weber's study of the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is usually regarded as one of his most important contributions. In this work, Weber argues for the impact of ideas, particularly religious ideas on creating and transforming of material reality, society and its forms. Thus, Weber sees the primacy of capital and 'capitalism' in the social organisation of the contemporary age, as the most significant way to grasp the society in which we live. For Weber, capitalism is the outcome of the appearance and development of a particular form of religious consciousness the Protestant ethic.

The Protestant ethic, particularly the Calvinist ethic, is a rationalisation of traditional Christian doctrine, which reconciled otherworldly aspirations with the pursuit of this-worldly material gain. Drawing attention to the precise ways in which the pursuit of personal religious salvation are made to coincide with the achievement of material prosperity and power, Weber argued that it was this 'heroic' rationalisation that gave birth to capitalism. The most important rationalisation is the development of a 'this-worldly' asceticism foregoing of consumption of 'the pleasures of the flesh', in favour of saving and accumulation. Through it the believer assures himself of being included amongst those born to be saved, in a religious sense. Weber argued that the rationalism embedded in the Protestant ethic helped to further develop the material condition of modern capitalism (see Hearn 1985: 76).

### 17.3.1 Capitalism

Max Weber identifies some important conditions for the development of rational capitalism in modern society. These are: Private ownership of all physical means of production, freedom of the market, mechanisation, written law and administration, **free labour** and commercialisation of economic life. Weber claims that though these conditions had been developing in various parts of the world, they first appeared in modern rational capitalism where the religious ethic of Protestantism prevailed. To him Protestantism was instrumental in weakening traditional opposition to the development of material bases of rational capitalism (see Hearn 1985: 77).

Weber is far more impressed with the rationality of capitalist society and the systematic rationality of its social forms and processes. The modes of social organisation and association, and the very mentality of the people reflect rationality. Weber devotes a great deal of space and time to the consideration of the various ways in which capitalist society is not only more rational than the society or societies which preceded it, but actually introduces and establishes reason itself as a desirable process and principle of organisation. His major work, *'Economy and Society'*, explores the ways in which capitalist society is compatible with clear principles of reason and rational organisation. It goes on to examine how an ongoing process of rationalisation and further rationalisation is part of the logic of the growth of capitalism.

### 17.3.2 Bureaucracy

According to Weber modern bureaucracy is social manifestation of formal rationality. Formal rationality implies the importance of rules and procedures rather than beliefs and sentiments. Bureaucracy's development is based on the separation of the rulers from the ruled, people from the position, and sentiments and beliefs from procedures and regulations. Thus there are several senses in which Weber sees bureaucracy as a form of rationalisation. Among them those that need to be enumerated here are: (i) the systematisation of purposes and procedures (ii) rights and obligations based on established and clearly-defined norms for the purpose of efficiency, and (iii) most importantly, the rationalisation of the procedures of recruitment, promotion and retirement of bureaucrats through which their lives gain security and manageability.

To Weber, bureaucracy is a structure of rational domination. As you already know, bureaucracy is a typical expression of rational-legal authority. Hence, power is legitimate only when its exercise is consistent with the formal, impersonal rules and regulations, which define the organisation. Again a bureaucratic organisation helps promote rational action of its members (see Hearn 1985: 79).

Weber sees the development of bureaucracy as part and parcel of the logic of the development of capitalism, because it is so rational and rationally oriented. Weber also highlights an important paradox or contradiction. The growth of the bureaucratic mentality stifles creativity and daring, the very things that made capitalism possible.

It is time now to complete Check Your Progress 2.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Explain how rationality is projected in Max Weber’s work. Answer in about six lines.

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- ii) Explain a process in which the Protestant ethic brought about rationalisation of Christian belief which was favourable for the emergence of capitalism in Europe Answer in about five lines.

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**Activity 1**

Is there a word for rationality in your mother-tongue? If yes, provide the term and give its definition.

**17.3.3 Types of Rationality: ‘Zweckrationalitat’ and ‘Wertrationalitat’**

After reading the above sub-sections you may have concluded that rationality is a characteristic of modern, capitalist society alone. Does this mean that non-capitalist forms of social organisation are irrational? Well, as students of sociology you know that society has a special meaning and coherence for its members. Each society has its own logic of development, its own mode of order and social relationship. In this sense, all societies, capitalist or non-capitalist have a rationality of their own. Exploring a large variety of social forms and norms, Weber identifies two distinct types of rationality. These are: i) ‘Zweckrationalitat’ or goal oriented/ ends based rationality and ii) ‘Wertrationalitat’ or value-based rationality.

The former is characteristic of modern, capitalist society and flows from goal-oriented social action. Zweckrationalitat refers to rationalisation of means and goals/ ends. Reason and logical thinking are recommended in order to obtain one’s desires.

Wertrationalität, on the contrary, is characteristic of traditional social formations. It is involved with morality and touches upon emotions, sentiments and beliefs. Societal approval of individual action is considered important. Weber believes that traditional societies did have rational elements in their social organisation, but these were defined in terms of values or moral norms.

To give you an illustration, take agriculture in traditional (pre-capitalist) society. When to plough, when to sow or when to harvest the crop was determined by rational requirements of season, temperature or moisture in the soil. But at the same time these occasions were also sanctioned as morally desirable events. Festivities and rituals were prescribed for each of these events. In contrast, in a modern factory (capitalist organisation) all activities are governed mechanically by standards of maximising productivity in terms of means and ends.

### Activity 2

See a film or read a short story. Identify five social actions in the film or story. State their types in terms of goal-oriented rationality and value oriented rationality.

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## 17.4 RATIONALITY IN SOCIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION: VALUE-FREE SOCIOLOGY

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It has been mentioned earlier that the concept of rationality permeates Weber's work from two distinct but inter-related directions, firstly the actual march of rationalisation as part of the historical process, and secondly as a principle of method, a mode of investigating society. Weber is part of the mainstream of the development of sociology, to which he is amongst the most eminent contributors. He devotes, as other classical sociologists, time to the consideration and elaboration of methods, to the actual utilisation of these methods, and is involved in the important historical ventures of his times.

One of the basic concerns of Max Weber is the relation between science and human action. Here he conceives sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. To Weber, the prime characteristics of the world we live in are rationalisation. The rationalisation characteristic of modern societies is expressed in terms of Zweckrational actions, actions in relation to goals. He also viewed science as an important aspect of the process of rationalisation which is the characteristic of the modern European societies (Aron 1967: 189). As a part of rationalisation, Weber argued, for a 'value-free' social science, a debate that continues even in our own times though in different terms, Weber was a firm advocate of separating the rationality of social inquiry from the attempt to make the world more rational. The personal evaluations of the sociologist he said, must be separate from the analysis of society that he/she conducted. The main points of Weber's value-free sociology can be briefly stated as

- i) Sociologists in their study of society are principally concerned with the analysis and understanding of values, as these are the crucial elements of any society. However, they must not let their own values come in the way of a clear understanding of the subject matter. This is the basic foundation of a value-free sociology.
- ii) Sociologists, as human beings are fundamentally involved in evaluating, or passing certain value-judgements. In so far as they are personally involved, can hardly avoid having or living by values. The values, by which sociology develops, however, are the values by which knowledge and science develop as the commitment to dispassionate inquiry. In this inquiry, the sociologists own experiences of valuing or devaluing are themselves data, giving insight into the meaning and relevance of that which they explore.
- iii) The development of a value-free social science in this sense is necessary for creating a body of reliable and assured knowledge. As to whether such knowledge becomes subsequently cause for action is not within the domain of merely sociology as a discipline. Knowledge can guide action only when the discipline itself becomes reliable.

It bears mentioning, in this context that Weber in addition to being an eminent sociologist was also a politician in the troubled Germany between the two World Wars. He is remembered, both for his sociological studies and political activity as having firmly championed the cause of reason, at a time when it was beset with challenges on all sides. This is a fact we must keep in mind when we consider his plea for a value-free sociology.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Describe Zweckrational society in about three lines.  
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- ii) Describe Wertrational society in three lines.  
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- iii) Describe the basic idea of a value-free sociology, in about three lines.  
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**17.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you have read about the idea of rationality and its accompanying process, rationalisation, the two key themes in the work of Max Weber.



After learning what these terms mean, you have seen how they were studied by Weber in his analysis of Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy. You have also seen how Weber classified rationality into two types namely, 'Zweckrationalitat' and 'Wertrationalitat'. Finally, you have learnt how Weber used rationality in sociological investigation and argued for a value-free sociology.

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## 17.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Authority</b>	Legitimate power that is institutionalised.
<b>Free labour</b>	Free labour is the labour of the contractual labourers who are free to choose their employment, employer and the terms and conditions of employment.
<b>Hypothesis</b>	A statement of inter-related concepts, which may be tested for its validity.
<b>Reason</b>	An explanation or justification of an act, idea etc.
<b>Value</b>	An idea about what is good, right, wise or beneficial.

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## 17.7 FURTHER READING

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Thompson, K. and J. Tunstall (eds). 1971. *Sociological Perspectives*. Penguin Books: Middlesex

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## 17.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) specialisation, technological
- ii) b) the external world
- iii) a) F (b) F (c) T

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Rationality appears in two distinct ways in Max Weber's work. First, he studied society as a process of rationalisation: that is the logic of change in society itself from less rational form to or more rational form. Secondly he used rationality as a methodological tool, i.e. a methodological principle, a strategy of inquiry. In this sense rationality is a mode of inquiry that seeks to discover the reason of a social form or development.
- ii) Weber argued that rationalisation of traditional Protestant ethic gave birth to capitalism. The most important rationalisation is the

development of an inner worldly asceticism, a foregoing of consumption in favour of saving and a accumulation among the Protestant believers. Hence believers assume themselves of being included amongst those born to be saved in a religious sense.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Zweckrational society is a capitalist society. This society represents the rationalisation of the means and ends and resorts to reason as an effective instrument to affect one's desires.
- ii) Wertrational society is a traditional society. This society has more to do with morality that touches upon value judgments, emotions, and stresses social approval of individual activity.
- iii) Sociologists in their study of society are primarily concerned with the analysis and understanding of values, as these are crucial elements of any society. However, they must not let his own values come in the way of a clear understanding of that which they undertakes to study.



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