
UNIT 18 METHODOLOGY: MARX, DURKHEIM AND WEBER

Methodology: Marx,
Durkheim and Weber

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18.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to understand and compare the methodological perspectives of

- Karl Marx
- Emile Durkheim and
- Max Weber.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In Blocks 2, 3 and 4 of this course, you have studied in detail some of the enduring sociological contributions of the 'founding fathers' of sociology.

In this Block, we are going to compare the views of Marx, Durkheim and Weber on certain issues. Before we do so, it is important to understand their distinctive methodologies, and this is exactly what we will do in this unit. For this purpose, we have divided the unit into four sections. In the first section (18.2), we will try and understand the meaning of the term ‘methodology’ and the reasons for studying it. The second section (18.3) will take up the methodological perspective of Karl Marx. The third and fourth sections (18.4 and 18.5) will be devoted to an understanding of the methodologies of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, respectively.

18.2 MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF METHODOLOGY

In Blocks 2, 3 and 4 you have studied many things. You are now familiar with Karl Marx’s theory of historical materialism, his understanding of class conflict, dialectics and so on. You also have an understanding of the contributions of Durkheim and Weber.

Yet, no separate unit has been devoted to the study of their methodologies in detail. The reason behind this is that, we hope that your study of the substantive or concrete elements of their work will help you to gain a better appreciation of their frameworks of enquiry, which is what is attempted in this unit. We have used the term ‘methodology’ a number of times so far without really clarifying its meaning. Let us do so now.

18.2.0 What do we mean by ‘Methodology’?

By the term ‘methodology’, we refer to a system of method or procedures with which the study of a problem is approached.

18.2.1 Difference between Methodology and Method

There is an important point to be noted here; ‘methods’ and ‘methodology’ are not one and the same thing. Whilst methods are a part of methodology, methodology is a system which combines or integrates certain methods. Methods are the tools or techniques, which help to implement a methodological approach or perspective.

Let us take an example. In Block 3, you studied how Emile Durkheim understood the problem of suicide. His methodological perspective was the study of social phenomena as social facts and his methods included those of concomitant variations.

Having understood the difference between methodology and method, let us now see why we should study methodology. You might point out that having understood the substantive contributions of the founding fathers, a study of their methodology is not really necessary. This is not the case.

18.2.2 Why Study Methodology?

A study of methodology does more than merely list methods. It gives us an understanding of the overall approach of thinkers to the problems under study. In sociology, the subject matter or problems under study are human beings and human society. Sociologists are not observing atoms or

molecules under a microscope. They are studying human life, human behaviour, human problems. Sociological methodology includes a conception about social reality. It reflects the manner in which thinkers conceptualise the relationship between individuals and society. It gives us an insight into the aims and objectives with which thinkers study society. Since the subject matter under study is so closely and intimately connected to the sociologist, methodology sharply reflects the sociologist's overall concerns and orientations regarding human beings and society. Hence, studying methodology is not only very important but also very interesting.

Let us now go on to examine the methodology of Karl Marx. You have seen in Block 2 that Marx was not a 'sociologist' in the sense that he called his work specifically 'sociological'. He was also an economist, a philosopher and a political activist. Thus, he did not specifically set out to define special methodological rules for sociology as Durkheim and Weber did later. Yet, the mode of enquiry that he introduced has had a profound impact on sociology, both methodologically and substantively.

18.3 THE METHODOLOGY FOR KARL MARX

Karl Marx introduced into the social sciences of his time a new methodology, new concepts and a number of bold new hypotheses.

All of these came to exercise a deep influence on the writing of history, political science and sociology.

Marx elaborated his conception of the nature of society and the means to study it in a more precise and empirical manner than the social theorists before him did. We will examine, firstly, Marx's materialistic conception of history. You have read about this in Block 2 of this course. Here we will briefly review it in the light of his methodology.

18.3.0 Marx's Materialistic Conception of History

The motivating force in history, according to Marx, is the manner in which human beings act upon nature in order to obtain their basic survival needs. The production of material life is the first historical act, in Marx's view. Even after meeting survival or primary needs, human beings remain dissatisfied. This is because new or secondary needs arise as soon as primary ones are fulfilled.

In the effort to satisfy primary and secondary needs, human beings enter into social relationships with each other. As material life becomes more complex, social relationship too undergo a change. Division of labour emerges in society and class formation begins. The existence of classes implies that distinct divisions of human beings have emerged, in other words, society is divided into the "haves" and the "have-nots".

You have studied that Marx places particular stress on the material or economic basis of society. It is the economic "infrastructure" that shapes or moulds/the rest of society. It is the particular mode of production from which emanate the relations of production on which the whole cultural superstructure rests. Law, polity, cultural formations and so on cannot be

separated from the economic basis in which they are embedded. We can thus say that Marx's approach to society is holistic. This is a very important methodological contribution. Marx stresses on the study of human societies as wholes or systems in which social groups, institutions, beliefs and doctrines are interrelated. They cannot be studied in isolation, rather they should be studied in their interrelations.

However, in the ultimate analysis, it is the economic system, which proves decisive in shaping the specific features of the superstructure of society. Marx applies his materialistic conception of history by studying the history of human society in terms of distinct stages, each marked by a distinct mode of production. From the mode of production flow the specific kinds of relationships and class antagonisms distinct in every phase of history.

In Block 2 of this course you have studied in detail Marx's theory of "historical materialism" and the stages of history identified by him. Marx can be described as a relativising historicist. By this we mean that he roots all systems of social relationships and all systems of ideas within a specific historical context. He holds that each stage of history is marked by class struggles, but the nature of the struggle and the participants in the struggle are qualitatively different in every epoch. The slaves in the ancient stage are very different from the feudal serfs or the capitalist industrial workers.

Briefly, Marx assigns to the economic realm the crucial role of shaping the nature of other sub-systems in society. He studies society in a holistic fashion, stressing on the inter-relatedness of its components. He also takes note of the specificities of the various stages of history. Although Marx insists that the history of human society is the history of class struggle, he accounts for the distinctive features of the classes down the ages.

Let us now move on to another significant methodological contribution of Marx, namely, his conception of social conflict and social change.

18.3.1 Social Conflict and Social Change

Early sociology, as you have studied in Block 1 of this course, was profoundly influenced by the idea of evolution. The work of Auguste Comte and more importantly, Herbert Spencer reflected the doctrine of evolutionary change. We can say that the early sociologists stressed on change through peaceful growth. For them, social order and harmony was normal and disorder and conflict was pathological.

It is against this background that you will be able to appreciate better how important Marx's contributions are. According to Marx, societies are inherently mutable or changeable systems. Changes are produced mainly by internal contradictions and conflicts. Each stage in human history is marked by certain contradictions and tensions. These become intensified over a period of time to such an extent that the existing system has to break down, giving way to a new system. In other words, each historical stage contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The new system emerges from the womb of the old. Thus, Marx understands conflict not as something pathological and harmful, but as a creative force. It is the engine of progress.

His conception of conflict as the major harbinger of change reflects in the unique way in which he deals with both the past and the present, and also in his anticipation of the future. This brings us to one of the problem areas in Marxist social theory, namely, the conflict between objective science and political commitment. Let us briefly consider this aspect of Marx's work.

Activity 1

Carefully read the daily newspapers. Identify some major national or international conflicts. Try to interpret them using Marx's methodology. Write a note of about one page and compare it if possible with other students at your Study Centre.

18.3.2 Marx's Notion of 'Praxis'

Ever since the birth of sociology right down to the present time, sociologists have argued over the separation between sociological theory and political ideology. Marx's work represents that stream of social thought where theory and political activism unite. Marx very clearly voices his opinions of capitalist society in his work. He sees it as an inhuman system of exploitation and anticipates its breakdown under the weight of its own contradictions. He awaits the birth of a classless, communist society, which will be free of contradictions. Marx advocates "praxis", namely, using theory for practical political action. Thus, Marx's methodology aims not just at understanding society, but also anticipating and assisting in changing it. You can read more about the concept of 'praxis' in Box 18.1.

Box 18.1

Praxis: The word 'praxis' is of Greek origin and refers to action or activity of all kinds. The term passed into Latin and through it to the modern European languages. The Greek Philosopher Aristotle gave the term a more precise meaning and used it to denote specifically human activity. He contrasted it with theory or 'theoretica'. In medieval European philosophy, the term was used to denote applications of theory, e.g. theoretical geometry ('theoretica') and practical or applied geometry (praxis). The medieval European scholar Francis Bacon insisted that true knowledge is that which bears fruit in praxis, defining it as the application of human powers and actions for the attainment of good and useful things. Immanuel Kant distinguished between "pure" and "practical" reason in his work *Critique of Pure Reason*. Philosophy is thus divided into theoretical and practical. The theoretical part tells us 'what there is' and the practical one tells us 'what there should be'. Kant insisted on the primacy of practical philosophy. Hegel too accepted the distinction between the two but also thought that the two united in a third, higher moment. Hegel's philosophical system is divided into three parts, namely, logic philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit. In each of these parts, a distinction between theoretical and practical aspects arises and is transcended in a higher synthesis. In Hegel's system, praxis became one of the moments of 'absolute truth'. In Marx's, the concept of praxis becomes central. Philosophy is to be transcended

into revolutionary action, which will transform the world. Marx speaks of praxis as the goal of true philosophy and revolution as true praxis. Marx sees 'praxis' basically as free, conscious activity through which alienation is eliminated. Thus praxis is the transformation of alienative labour into non-alienative, creative 'self-activity'.

Let us now go on to study the methodology of Durkheim. Here, we move on to a distinctly sociological methodology. Durkheim, as you already know, was actively involved in developing the emerging concerns of the sociology of his times. According to Randall Collins (1985: 123), Durkheim made sociology a distinctive science with its own lawful generalisations.

Check Your Progress 1

Answer the following in three sentences each.

- i) Distinguish between 'methods' and 'methodology'.
- ii) Why is Marx's approach to society said to be 'holistic'?
- iii) Marx is a 'relativising historicist'. What does this statement mean?
- iv) Complete the following sentences.
 - a) According to Marx, changes in society are mainly produced by
 - b) By 'praxis' Marx refers to
 - c) Durkheim made a clear distinction between and sociological explanations.
 - d) According to Durkheim, human desires can be checked by

18.4 THE METHODOLOGY OF EMILE DURKHEIM

Emile Durkheim is one of the key figures in the development of a distinctly sociological orientation. Durkheim's work is marked by an emphasis on the social aspect of phenomena. To Durkheim goes the credit of making a clear separation between psychological or individualistic explanations and sociological explanations. To understand this point further, we will first describe how Durkheim views the interrelationship between the individual and society. We will then consider how Durkheim identifies social facts as the subject matter of sociology and finally, we will describe in brief his "functional analysis" of society.

18.4.0 Individual and Society

To Durkheim, human beings are creatures with unlimited desires. Unlike other animals they are not satisfied when biological needs have been fulfilled. Human desires can only be held in check by external or societal control, according to Durkheim. Society constitutes a regulative force, which sets certain limits to individual passions.

When social regulations break down, the controlling influence of society on individuals is no longer effective. Individuals are left to their own devices. Durkheim terms this state of affairs as “anomie” or normlessness. It is a condition wherein individual desires are no longer regulated by common norms, thus leaving individuals without moral guidelines for pursuing their goals.

According to Lewis Coser (1971: 133), the major concern in Durkheim’s sociology is the problem of social order versus disorder. Durkheim is concerned with explaining the forces that contribute to social regulation and de-regulation. He addresses himself to the tensions between individual desires and social cohesion. He attempts to establish a balance between individual and societal claims.

Focus on analysing this tension expresses itself all throughout Durkheim’s work. For instance, in *Division of Labour* Durkheim (1893) identifies two types of societies, those based on mechanical solidarity and those based on organic solidarity. The former society is marked by the total grip of the ‘collective conscience’ on the individual. The latter type is marked by the flowering of individualism. Durkheim speaks favourably of organic solidarity because he sees it as a state where individual concerns can in fact help build stronger societal bonds. Thus, Durkheim’s understanding of the relationship between individual and society is a complex one. He does not take an extreme stance by stating that the individual is unimportant, and emphasises the role of individual creativity. He does not advocate pure, unchecked individualism either, but recognises the need for societal regulation.

For Durkheim, society is ‘sui-generis’. It is self-generating. It is more than just the sum of individuals that constitute it. It existed before the individual and will continue to exist long after individuals. Its members are born and die, but society lives on. It thus exists independently of the individuals that constitute it. However, individuals cannot exist without or apart from society. Having understood the interrelationship between individual and society as described by Durkheim, let us go on to see what, according to him, the task of the sociologist is. In other words, what is the subject matter of sociology?

18.4.1 Subject Matter of Sociology — The Social Fact

In his major works ‘*The Division of Labour in Society*’, ‘*Suicide*’ and ‘*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*’, Emile Durkheim explains the phenomena in question by sociological explanations. He rejects individualistic or psychological explanations. For instance, in tracing the causes for suicide, Durkheim dismisses explanations like madness or alcoholism (psychological explanations) but looks towards society for explanation. For Durkheim, suicide has a social aspect and reflects poor social integration. For Durkheim sociology is the study of essentially social facts and the explanation of these facts in a sociological manner. Durkheim systematically discusses this in ‘*The Rules of Sociological Method*’ (1895). He tries to demonstrate that there may and must be a sociology, which is an objective science, based on the model of other sciences. The subject matter of this science must be specific and distinct from that of the other

sciences and must be such that it can be observed and explained just like facts are observed and explained in other sciences. To make this objective science of social facts possible, Durkheim gives the following two guidelines, namely, (1) social facts must be regarded as things, and (2) a social fact exercises a constraint on individuals.

Let us examine the first of these points. What does Durkheim mean when he asks us to regard social facts as “things”? He means that we must shed our preconceptions and prejudices and observe social facts from outside. We must discover and observe them as we discover physical facts. For instance, you want to study ‘democracy’ in India. If you follow Durkheim’s suggestion, you will shed your preconceived or vague ideas, e.g., “democracy is a failure in India” or “democracy is people’s rule”, and so on.

You will instead observe it objectively and scientifically. How can a social fact be observed and recognised? This brings us to the second point, namely, that a social fact forces itself upon or exercises a constraint upon the individual. To take the example of democracy in India, the social fact, namely, democracy, can be recognised during elections. Politicians ask citizens for their votes and support. Thus democracy forces itself upon or constrains citizens to make certain choices or act in a certain manner. Let us take another example of a social fact, which exercises constraints on individual behaviour. You are part of a crowd in a cricket match. When Sachin Tendulkar hits a six the whole crowd goes into frenzy. You may not be a Tendulkar fan, but since you are in that crowd, you too will clap and cheer. You are constrained or pressurised into behaving in a certain manner. These two propositions, to regard social facts as things and to recognise social facts by the constraints they exercise, are according to Raymond Aron, (1970: 72) the foundations of Durkheim’s methodology.

Durkheim’s prescription to study social facts externally and objectively shows the impact of natural sciences in shaping sociology. Remember that sociology was in its infancy at that time, struggling to carve out a niche for itself in the academic world. The contributions of Durkheim to the methodology of the subject must be seen in this light. Let us now briefly look at Durkheim’s ‘functional’ analysis of social institutions and phenomena.

18.4.2 Durkheim’s Functional Analysis of Society

Among Durkheim’s most important methodological contributions is his functional analysis or explanation. The idea of studying social phenomena in terms of their function or role in maintaining the life of society has its origins in biology. Each part of a living organism has a particular function in maintaining the life and health of the organism. For instance, if we consider the various organisms of the human body in a functionalist manner, we will see that each part contributes to maintaining the whole. The heart pumps blood, the lungs purify air, the stomach grinds and breaks down food, the brain directs and coordinates the other organs. All these functions performed by the various organs help to keep us alive and healthy.

If society is studied with a functionalist perspective, we will view the various systems and institutions of society in terms of their contributions in keeping

society intact, or maintaining social order. Durkheim clearly establishes the procedure of the functional approach in studying social phenomena. According to him, “the determination of function is... necessary for the complete explanation of the phenomena... To explain a social fact it is not enough to show the cause on which it depends; we must also... show its function in the establishment of social order.” (*Rules of Sociological Method*, p. 97.)

In other words, for Durkheim, sociological understanding of phenomena cannot be complete until the role or function of these phenomena in maintaining social order is understood. The concept of function plays a key part in all of Durkheim’s work. In *Division of Labour* he tries to see how the process of occupational specialisation functions to maintain social order and cohesion. (You will study this point in greater detail in Unit 20 of this Block.) In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he demonstrates the function of religious rules and beliefs in strengthening social bonds, as you will see in Unit 19. The thread that runs right through Durkheim’s work is the need to demonstrate social order.

Briefly, Emile Durkheim attempts to demarcate a subject matter for sociology that will enable the sociologist to gain an objective and unbiased view of social phenomena. The task of the sociologist, according to Durkheim, is to understand social facts in a sociological manner. By doing so, he/she can give explanations regarding the function of social phenomena in helping to maintain social order.

If you have read the above pages on the methodology of Marx and Durkheim carefully, one major point of difference will have become clear to you. Marx’s emphasis is on conflict whilst Durkheim’s is on order. Let us now briefly compare the perspectives of these thinkers. But before that, complete Activity 2.

Activity 2

Identify any two social institutions in your society, e.g., marriage, family, caste, clan, etc. Try and understand them with the help of functional analysis. Write a note of about two pages and compare it if possible with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

18.4.3 Social Conflict Versus Social Order

Whilst Marx stressed the role of conflict and struggle in maintaining the vitality of society, Durkheim stresses harmony and social order. Durkheim regards conflict as pathological or abnormal; Marx regards it as the vehicle of social change. Durkheim studies social facts in terms of their contribution to social order and Marx constantly explores the contradictions and tensions within a society, which will bring in change.

Notice, though, that both thinkers treat society as an entity or reality in itself. Marx speaks of various subsystems constituting an interrelated whole and is concerned with the historical movement of the total society from one stage to another. Durkheim too speaks of society as a reality, which is ‘sui-generis’. Both thinkers are more concerned with social wholes rather

than individual behaviour and feeling which, according to them, emanate from particular societal conditions. Marx and Durkheim can thus be described as social realists.

This point becomes particularly relevant when we compare their methodologies with that of Max Weber. Weber's brand of sociology reflects a shift in emphasis. Weber's starting-point is social action. He is concerned with the behaviour of the individual which, he holds, is shaped by the individual's attitudes, values and beliefs. Weber is concerned with interpreting the meanings ascribed by actors to the world around them. Let us now first complete Check Your Progress 2 and then study Max Weber's methodology in some detail.

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions in 2 to 3 sentences each.

- i) State whether the following statements are True' (T) or 'False' (F).
 - a) Durkheim held that the individual is unimportant because society is all -powerful.
 - b) In organic solidarity, individuals can exist without society.
- ii) How can a 'social fact' be recognised? Give an example.
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.....
- iii) Give two examples of Durkheim's functional analysis.
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18.5 THE METHODOLOGY OF MAX WEBER

Max Weber conceives sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. He focuses on the subjective meanings that human actors attach to their actions and interactions within their specific social-historical contexts.

Weber's focus on the meanings ascribed by actors to their actions reflects his distinctive methodology. Weber challenges the notion that social sciences can be modelled on the lines of natural science. He thus charts out a special subject matter and special methods of inquiry for social sciences.

Weber rejects the positivist notion that the aims and methods of natural sciences and social or cultural sciences are the same. He takes the stand that the human being, in contrast to things or natural objects, has certain underlying motivations, which the sociologist must try to understand. He suggests a method that will help the sociologist achieve this purpose. Let us see what it is.

18.5.0 'Verstehen' or Interpretative Understanding

Weber points out that a natural scientist's understanding of natural phenomena is from the outside. Let us take an example. When a chemist studies the properties of a particular substance, he does so from the outside. When a sociologist tries to understand human society and culture, he approaches it as an insider, or a participant. Being human, the social scientist has access to the motives and feelings of his/her subject matter. Social scientists can understand human action by probing the subjective meanings that actors attach to their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. Sociological understanding is thus qualitatively different from that of other sciences. Sociology, in Weber's opinion, must use the method of interpretative understanding or "verstehen" (which means 'to understand' in German). The method of verstehen implies that the sociologist should visualise the motivations of the actor by trying to interpret his feelings, his understanding of the situation. But is verstehen sufficient for sociological explanation? According to Weber, it is only the first step. The next step of analysis is causal explanation or searching for the causes or reasons behind the occurrence of any social phenomena. In order to facilitate sociological analysis, Weber develops an important methodological tool, which you have already studied in detail in Block 4 of this course. This is the "ideal type".

18.5.1 The Ideal Type

The ideal type provides a basic method for comparative study. It refers to creating a kind of model which includes the most prominent characteristics of the phenomena to be studied. In a way, it is an exaggerated picture of a particular reality. For instance, if you want to construct an ideal type of a villain in an Indian film, you may develop an image of a man with small, wicked eyes, a moustache, a deep voice and a sinister laugh, wearing a flashy suit, carrying a gun and surrounded by "gondas"! Of course, not all villains in Indian movies are just like this. But you have abstracted the most commonly found characteristics and created an analytical construct (see figure 18.1: Ideal type of a film villain). This ideal type can be used as a measuring rod with which the sociologist can compare existing reality.



Figure 18.1 Ideal type of a film villain

Ideal types help to construct hypotheses. Using ideal types, the sociologist can measure real development and clarify important aspects of reality. In Block 4, you have seen how Weber used the ideal types of “the Protestant ethic” and “the spirit of capitalism”, showing the linkages between them. His study of the sociology of religion with which you are by now familiar, reflects the ‘historicity’ which is an important aspect of Weber’s approach. At this point it will be interesting for you to complete Activity 3.

Activity 3

Construct ideal types of (a) the Indian joint family and/or (b) life in an urban slum. Try and compare the existing reality with your ideal types. How representative or accurate are your ideal types? Note down your findings.

18.5.2 Causality and Historical Comparison

What we have studied so far about Weber’s methodology is that he advocates the study of social action. To do so, an interpretative understanding of the motives and values of actors is recommended by him. The use of ‘ideal types’ will help the sociologist to gain insights into actual, concrete events. Weber is also interested in providing causal explanations. But human society being so complex single or absolute causes to explain phenomena cannot be given, according to Weber. He thus speaks of a plurality of causes. Certain causes, however, can be identified as being more important than others. For instance, in his understanding of capitalism, Weber speaks of the importance of religious ethics. But he certainly does not say that religious values are the only causes behind the growth of modern capitalism. To show the importance of religious values in influencing the development of capitalism, Weber uses the method of historical comparison. You have seen in Unit 16, Block 4 of this course how he compared the growth of capitalism in the west to the absence of its growth in ancient China and India. The reason for this difference, he concluded, was the presence or absence of an appropriate ethic or value-system. Thus, Weber’s methodology does include a search for causal explanations but not monocausal explanations. Since Weber was so concerned with the importance of values and beliefs in social action, it will be interesting to ask what his stand concerning values in social science was. Did Weber, like Marx combine theory and political activism? Did he, like Durkheim speak of strict objectivity? Why not read the next sub-section for an answer?

18.5.3 Values in Social Science

Science is often described as an ‘objective’ search for truth. It is supposed to be value-free, unbiased, impartial. You have seen how Durkheim advocates objective understanding of social facts and how he recommends that the sociologist free himself/herself from prejudice and pre-conceived notions. Is an ‘objective’, ‘value-free’ science, natural or social, really possible? According Weber, values play an important role in choosing a particular topic of study. Why have you chosen sociology as an elective course? Certain values have guided you. You might have thought it

interesting, or easy, or may be you did not like the other elective courses. Similarly, if a scientist decides to study, say, the behaviour of an atom or the life and customs of rural Indians, he/she has been guided by certain value orientations.

But Weber makes a clear distinction between value-orientations and value judgments. The researcher or scientist may be guided to undertake a particular study because of certain value-orientations, but, according to Weber, he/she must not pass moral judgments about it. The researcher must observe ethical neutrality. His/her job is to study phenomena, not pass judgments about whether they are 'good' or 'evil'. These, in brief are the major methodological contributions of Weber.

You have by now gained an understanding of the distinctive methodological orientations of each of the three founding fathers of sociology. It is time now, to ask an important question, namely, how did they define the role and tasks of the social scientist? The answer to this question will help you to summarise the aims and objectives, which they had in mind when they undertook their respective studies of social phenomena.

18.5.4 The Role of the Social Scientist

You have already studied how Emile Durkheim conceptualises sociology as the study of social facts. The sociologist, having rid himself/herself of preconceived notions and prejudices, can objectively understand the characteristics of social facts and study the role of social institutions in helping to maintain social order.

Weber assigns to the sociologist the task of interpretative understanding of the motives of human actors. The humanness of the sociologist can prove an asset in understanding society and culture because the sociologist can examine phenomena from the inside. He/she can attempt causal explanations by using ideal types and historical comparison. But ethical neutrality must be maintained. In Marx, we find that the role of the social scientist is linked to the role of the political activist. By understanding the tensions and conflicts that mark society, the social scientist can anticipate and help to pave the way for an ideal society, free of contradictions and exploitation.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Complete the following, statements.
 - a) According to Weber, social scientists can understand human action by probing assigned by actors to their behaviour.
 - b) can be used as a measuring rod to compare existing reality.
 - c) Weber distinguishes between value-orientations and
- ii) State whether the following statements are 'True' (T) or 'False' (F)
 - a) Weber maintained that a social scientist must give monocausal explanations for social phenomena.

- b) Since social science cannot be value-free, sociologists cannot maintain ethical neutrality.

18.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to understand what is meant by ‘methodology’ and why it is important to study it. We have then briefly described the methodological perspectives of each of the three founding fathers, drawing comparisons on the way.

We studied how Marx conceptualised the history of society using a materialistic methodology. Studying social institutions in terms of their relatedness, Marx stressed the inherently mutable or changeable nature of society. In his view, social conflict is the engine of change and it is the role of the politically committed social scientist to study and anticipate the birth of the classless society of the future, namely, the communist society.

Emile Durkheim was concerned with establishing sociology as a legitimate science. He introduced a certain rigour in sociological method. He spoke of ‘social facts’ as the proper subject-matter of sociological enquiry and made a clear distinction between psychological and sociological explanations. It was Durkheim who brought into vogue functional analysis, which is in use even today.

Max Weber’s methodology marked a shift in sociological emphasis. Whilst Durkheim and Marx practised social realism, Weber focused on interpretative understanding of the motives of human actors. He undertook comparative historical studies and provided multi-layered or multi-causal analyses of social phenomena.

The aims and objectives with which these thinkers approached the study of society differed. Whilst Durkheim and Weber were keen on maintaining a certain scientific aloofness, Marx believed in the use of theory to guide political action.

18.7 KEYWORDS

Anomie	A term used by Durkheim to denote a situation where previously existing norms have lost their validity. The individual no longer feels integrated into society and is left to his/her own devices.
Collective conscience	A term used by Durkheim to denote the totality of beliefs, sentiments and values held in common by the members of a society.
Ethical Neutrality	Not passing value-judgments, i.e. not commenting on whether something is “good” or “bad”.
Hypothesis	A statement of cause and effect which has to be scientifically proved. Hypotheses are important in scientific research and when proved, they

become laws. If they cannot be proved, they are discarded or improved upon. An example of a sociological hypothesis could be “the children of divorced parents are likely to become juvenile delinquents”. Sociologists must verify this hypothesis before it becomes a law.

Ideology

A body of ideas usually political and/or economic with which to guide policy.

**Mechanical solidarity
and organic solidarity**

Durkheim differentiated between solidarity or social bonds based on similarity (mechanical solidarity) on the one hand and differences or heterogeneity (organic solidarity) on the other. The former can be observed in simple traditional societies and the latter in more complex, modern societies.

Pathological

Diseased, harmful.

Positivist

Based on practical experience. The term ‘positivism’ is used to denote the scientific model on which early sociology tried to develop itself.

18.8 FURTHER READING

Aron, Raymond 1970. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volumes 1 and 2, Penguin: London. (See the sections on Marx, Durkheim and Weber)

Coser, Lewis 1971. *Masters of Sociological Thought - Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York. (See the sections on Marx, Durkheim and Weber.)

18.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) By ‘methodology’ we mean a system of methods or procedures with which the study of a problem is approached. ‘Methods’ refer to the specific techniques, which comprise methodology. Thus, methodology is a system and methods are parts or tools of that system.
- ii) Marx considered societies as social wholes. The various institutions and sub-systems of society were studied by him in terms of their interrelationships, not in isolation. Hence his approach is said to be ‘holistic’.
- iii) Marx considered the various stages of history to be distinctive and with their own specificities. For instance, although he considered class conflict to be a common feature of all the stages, he maintained that

its nature and participants differed in each stage. Hence he is described as 'relativising historicist'.

- iv) a) internal contradictions and conflicts
- b) tying together theory and political action
- c) psychological
- d) societal control.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) F b) F
- ii) A 'social fact' can be recognised because it exerts a constraint on individuals. It forces or pressurises individuals to behave in a certain manner. For example, if one is part of a crowd at a cricket match and the crowd claps and cheers, one also gets carried away and behaves like the others in the crowd.
- iii) In '*Division of Labour*' Durkheim explains the growth of occupational specialisation in terms of its contribution in bringing about social cohesion. In '*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*', Durkheim explains the role of religion in strengthening social bonds. This illustrates his functional analysis.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) a) subjective meanings
- b) ideal type
- c) value-judgments
- ii) a) F b) F

UNIT 19 RELIGION: DURKHEIM AND WEBER

Religion: Durkheim and Weber

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Emile Durkheim's Contribution to the Sociology of Religion
 - 19.2.0 Definition of Religion - Beliefs and Rites
 - 19.2.1 Durkheim's Study of 'Totemism'
 - 19.2.2 Religion and Science
- 19.3 The Contributions of Max Weber
 - 19.3.0 The Religion of India
 - 19.3.1 The Religion of China
 - 19.3.2 Ancient Judaism
- 19.4 Durkheim and Weber — A Comparison
 - 19.4.0 Units of Analysis
 - 19.4.1 The Role of Religion
 - 19.4.2 Gods, Spirits and Prophets
 - 19.4.3 Religion and Science
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Keywords
- 19.7 Further Reading
- 19.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

19.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Emile Durkheim's views on religion
- Max Weber's contributions to the sociology of religion
- the ways in which the views of these authors differed.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Religion, as you are aware, is something to which human beings attach a great deal of importance. It includes a system of beliefs and practices, which help human beings shape their actions and orientations. It binds people with other followers, bringing about a feeling of identification and unity. Sometimes it even makes people unite against followers of a different faith. Religion helps people to come to terms with the tragedies and crises of human life by providing explanations for these. It is a social phenomenon intimately connected with other social systems. The subject of religion has been one of great interest to sociologists and anthropologists. The contributions of Durkheim and Weber are very important in this regard.

In the first unit of this Block, we tried to understand the distinctive methodologies of the founding fathers of sociology. In this unit, we will see how Durkheim and Weber elaborated their respective methodologies through their studies on religion.

In the first section (19.1), we will examine the contributions of Durkheim to the study of religion by going over some important points made by him in his classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). The second section will briefly review Weber's main ideas pertaining to religion. In the third and final section, we will highlight the main points of difference in the approaches of Durkheim and Weber.

19.2 EMILE DURKHEIM'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Durkheim's work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is an important one. Its major ideas are discussed and debated by scholars and students even today. Before we go on to examine its major arguments, let us take up an important question. Why was Durkheim interested in the 'elementary forms' of religious life? Could he not have directed his attention to major religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity? Let us try to answer this question by taking a simple example from day-to-day life. If you can ride a bicycle, you will find it easier to balance on a motor-bike. Similarly, if the simplest form of religion is understood, it will be of immense use in understanding the complexities of 'organised' religions, in Durkheim's view. The most elementary or simple form of religion will be found in those societies with a correspondingly 'elementary' social organisation, namely, amongst the aborigines or primitive tribal communities. It is by understanding the aboriginal religion that Durkheim hoped to contribute to the understanding of complex systems of thought and belief. In the following sub-sections, we will try and see how he does this. Let us begin by examining how Durkheim defines religion.

19.2.0 Definition of Religion - Beliefs and Rites

To define religion, says Durkheim, we must first free the mind of all preconceived ideas of religion. Durkheim discards the notion that religion is concerned only with 'mysterious' or 'supernatural' phenomena, with gods, spirits and ghosts. He points out that religion is as concerned with the ordinary as the extraordinary aspects of life. The rising and setting of the sun, the regular patterns of the seasons, the growth of plants and crops, the birth of new life are as much a part of religious ideas as miracles and spectacular happenings. To define religion, he says, the various religious systems of the world must be examined in order to derive those elements, or characteristics, which they have in common. As Durkheim (1912: 38) puts it, "religion cannot be defined except by the characters which are found wherever religion itself is found".

According to Durkheim, all religions comprise two basic components, namely, beliefs and rites. Beliefs are the **collective representations** (about which you have studied in detail in Block 3 of this course) and rites are

determined modes of action, which are influenced by beliefs. As you have read earlier in Block 3 of this course, religious beliefs as studied by Durkheim presuppose the classification of all things into 'sacred' and 'profane'. There is an opposition between these two spheres which has to be carefully regulated through rites and ceremonies. The sacred is that which is set apart, considered holy and venerated or dreaded and avoided. The sacred is usually in a higher position, valued more than profane things, and its identity and power are protected by social rules. The profane, on the other hand, refers to the mundane, ordinary aspects of day-to-day existence. The sacred and profane are kept apart, says Durkheim, because they are heterogeneous (different), antagonistic (in conflict) and isolated (separated). Rites therefore exist to mediate between the two worlds. Let us take an example. Why are believers not allowed to wear their shoes inside a temple? Wearing shoes or chappals for walking is a routine, practical or profane act. The temple is considered a holy, pure place; it is sacred. The floor of the temple must therefore be protected from the polluting dirt of our shoes. The **sacred and profane** are kept apart.

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

Rites are the rules of conduct that follow from beliefs, which prescribe how human beings must behave With regard to sacred things. They can be positive, where the sacred is sought to be brought closer to the world of men, for example, through '*havan*' or sacrifice. Rites can be negative, which means the sacred and profane are sought to be kept apart, e.g. purification rites, fasts, penance or suffering. In Durkheim's view rites serve to sustain the intensity of religious-beliefs. They bring individuals together, strengthening their social natures. They are modes of expression of the collective conscience, which, as you have studied, refers to the commonly held values, beliefs and ideas of the community (see Giddens 1978: 84-89).

Defining religion in terms of beliefs and rites poses one problem. This definition would also include **magic**. Is there no difference between magic and religion? Following the ideas of the anthropologist Robertson-Smith, Durkheim holds that magic and religion are indeed different. Magic is a private, selfish practice, performed at the individual level. For example, if one wants to do better than one's neighbour, so one goes to the magician and by paying his/her fee, one asks him to cast a spell or perform '*jadoo-tona*' to kill your neighbour's cows or spoil his crops. Magic thus involves a bond only between the magician and his clients based on a selfish motive, in order to manipulate nature to suit individual purposes. Religion, on the other hand, is public and social. There are social bonds between followers, which unite them into a group leading a common life. Durkheim's (1912: 62) definition of religion taking into account these factors is as follows.

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices

which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”

(It must be clarified that by the term ‘Church’, Durkheim does not refer to the Christian **Church** alone. He uses it in the sense of a moral community or an organised group of followers of all faiths.)

Let us now see how Durkheim grapples with the understanding of elementary forms by considering the institution of **totemism** amongst the aborigines of Australia. But before that, why not check your progress?

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Complete the following sentences
 - a) Durkheim studied ‘elementary’ forms of religion because
 - b) According to Durkheim, all religions comprise
 - c) The ‘profane’ refers to
- ii) How does Durkheim distinguish between magic and religion? Answer in five sentences.

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19.2.1 Durkheim’s Study of Totemism

As has been mentioned earlier, Durkheim believes that to understand the more complex religions, one must understand first the simple forms. Durkheim maintains that totemism is the most simple form of religion. He chose to study totemism as practised by the aborigines of Central Australia. Ethnographic information on these groups was available in plenty. Their social organisation was the simplest known to sociologists and anthropologists. Totemism is linked with the social organisation of clans. The members of the clan believe themselves to have descended from some common ancestor — an animal, a plant or even some non-living object. The “common ancestor” is the “totemic object”. It is the totemic object that gives the clan its name and identity. But it is more than just a name, it is an emblem. It is often carved, engraved or designed on other objects belonging to the clan, even on the bodies of the clan members. This makes otherwise ordinary or common objects special. They are endowed with sacredness. Many taboos or ‘don’ts’ are attached to the totemic object. It cannot be killed or eaten, it must be treated with reverence. All things arranged in the clan are connected with and extensions of the totemic object. The clan members may not be related by blood, but they have a common name, a common emblem. **Clan exogamy** is thus an important rule. Religion and social organisation are thus intimately connected in such simple societies.

The totemic object and all that is concerned with it is considered sacred. Why? Durkheim maintains that it is not actually the animal or plant itself that is worshipped or held sacred, but a nameless and impersonal force which exists throughout the world and is diffused amongst all the material objects of the world. This force is described by various names “mana” by the Samoans, “wakan” by the Melanesians, “orenda” by some North American tribes. The totemic object is merely a symbol of the ‘totemic principle’ which is nothing but the clan itself. The clan is given a reality of its own. It is personalised and represented through the totemic object. In Durkheim’s view, ‘god’ is nothing but society **apotheosised** or glorified and given a different shape and form. Why is society worshipped? Durkheim says that it is physically and morally superior to individuals. It is ‘sui-generis’, with a reality of its own. Its power is feared, its authority is respected. When a soldier gives up his life to defend the flag of the country, he is not worshipping the flag itself, but what the flag stands for, namely, the nation.

Society exists in and through individual conscience. It demands our sacrifices, it strengthens and elevates the divine or sacred within each one of us. This is particularly evident during important religious ceremonies and festivals, which require the participation of the whole clan. Rituals such as festivals help to produce “**collective effervescence**” or a feeling of collective enthusiasm and involvement which strengthens social bonds and promotes social solidarity.

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

Having given interesting insights on primitive religion, how does Durkheim use it to understand complex systems of thought? You have just seen how he locates religion in its most ‘elementary’ form in a society with a correspondingly elementary social system. Following his logic, we can say that complex systems of thought will be found in modern, heterogeneous societies. Complex, modern societies, it is observed, are characterised by the development of science. Are religion and science drastically different? Let us first complete Activity 1 and then see what Durkheim feels about this in the following sub-section.

Activity 1

Make a list of five beliefs and rites of any two religions practised in our country. Compare your list if possible with other students at your Study Centre.

19.2.2 Religion and Science

Durkheim maintains that scientific thought has its origins in religious thought. Both religion and science reflect on nature, human beings and

society. Both attempt to classify things, relate them to one another and explain them. Scientific thought is a more developed and refined form of religious thought. The terms used in modern science like force and power have a religious origin.

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

Both religious and scientific thought contribute to the collective representations of society. There cannot be any conflict between the two because both are directed towards seeking universal principles. Thus the goal of both systems of thought is to help human beings rise above the limitations of private, individual nature and lead a life which is both, individual and social. Individuals need society in order to be truly human, and religion and science both contribute to unifying individuals with society (see Jones 1986:149-152).

We have just seen how Durkheim focuses on the role of religion in forging social solidarity by unifying individuals in the worship of an entity far greater than themselves, namely, society itself. Durkheim's perspective has had a tremendous impact on sociologists and social anthropologists, particularly those in England and France. His nephew, Marcel Mauss was one of the leading social anthropologists who followed in the Durkheimian tradition. You can read more about him in Box 19.1

Box 19.1 Marcel Mauss

Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) was the nephew of Emile Durkheim. Born in Lorraine (France), he grew up with a close knit, pious and orthodox Jewish family. He himself was never a religious man, and broke away from the Jewish faith. He was very close to his uncle and studied philosophy under his supervision at Bordeaux. Durkheim took endless trouble guiding young Marcel's studies. The close relationship between uncle and nephew resulted in an intellectual collaboration yielding such important works as *Forms of Primitive Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss 1903). Mauss took a major part in editing the journal *Annee Sociologique* started by Durkheim. Working for the 'Annee', Mauss interacted and collaborated with a number of brilliant young scholars like Hubert, Beuchat and Fauconner and published some important articles on magic, religion, sacrifice, prayer, the concept of the self and so on.

Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function, by Hubert and Mauss (1899) analysed the religious practice of sacrifice as a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds. The item or thing that is sacrificed is destroyed during the course of the ceremony.

The Gift (1925) is considered as Mauss's most influential work. Mauss focused on the systems of exchange of gifts and forms of contracts in archaic societies. The major hypotheses of this study are that (i) exchange, which includes the three obligations of giving, receiving and repaying, is common to all societies; (ii) the act of gift-giving maintains and strengthens social bonds of all kinds — cooperative, competitive and antagonistic. Mauss attempted to elaborate on the relation between patterns of exchange and the social structure.

The two World Wars brought tragedy in the life of Mauss. He lost a number of friends and colleagues in World War I. His beloved uncle, Durkheim, died grief stricken after the death of his son Andre in the War. The German occupation of France during World War II deprived him a second time of friends and colleagues and affected the balance of his mind. He never completed the books he had started work on and could not synthesise his many-sided and scattered work. He died in 1950, but left behind an important intellectual legacy. France and British anthropologists and sociologists, in particular were profoundly influenced by his work.

You will now read about Max Weber's contributions to the study of religion, but before moving on to Max Weber's views, let us complete Check Your Progress 2 to mark our understanding of the contents of this unit so far.

Check Your Progress 2

Answer the following questions in 2 sentences each.

- i) Why is clan exogamy a strict rule in totemic clans?

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- ii) Why is society worshipped, according to Durkheim?

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

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19.3 THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MAX WEBER

Max Weber's sociological study of religion is rooted in his conception of human beings as actors, ascribing meanings to the world around them. Weber's studies of religion focus on the ethos or ethics of religions of the world and their mutual interactions with other social sub-systems like polity and economy. There is thus a historicity in Weber's approach. You have studied in detail Weber's understanding of the effects of religion on economy in Unit 16 of Block 4 of this course. Weber, as you know, published a number of studies on religion, including *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and comparative studies on the religions of India, China and the religion of the Jews. In this section, we shall highlight these studies of world religions in order to bring out Weber's interest in studying religion in a historical and comparative way.

In this unit, we will not discuss *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Although this is an important work, you have been exposed to it in detail earlier. It shall also be taken up in Unit 21 of this Block when

we speak of Weber's theory of capitalism. However, you are advised to go back to Unit 16, Block 4 of this course, and have a look once more at the 'Protestant Ethic' thesis before moving on to the next sub-section.

Let us now touch upon some of the points Weber makes in his study of the world religion. We will begin with a review of his work on the religions of India.

19.3.0 The Religion of India

Weber speaks of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in *The Religion of India* which he wrote in 1916. Hinduism is to be understood in relation to the caste system. The caste system, which arose as a result of occupational specialisation which became hereditary over the centuries, was dominated by the Brahmin. It was the Brahmin caste that had access to the learning of the scriptures. This caste was the hereditary carrier of traditional ideas. The lower castes, particularly the Shudra faced a great number of socio-cultural disabilities. They were ritually 'impure' and were thus denied access to the scriptures. This automatically meant that they could not aspire to *moksha* or salvation, the Hindu ideal. The doctrine of '*karma*', according to Weber, is the central belief in Hinduism. A person's position in the present life is a consequence of good or evil deeds of '*karma*' in the past life. If the person's '*karma*' in this life is in accordance with his '*dharma*' or duty, he will be rewarded in future lives. The '*dharma*' of a Brahmin is to study the scriptures. The Kshatriya must defend his land and people, the Vaishya must engage in commerce, and the Shudra must serve the other castes. A person is born in a particular caste because of past '*karma*' and must dutifully carry out '*dharma*' in order to aspire to a better birth in the next life. The idea to aspire to was '*moksha*' or liberation from this cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It would be final freedom from the pain and uncertainty of life on earth.

Material prosperity was desirable, but it was temporary. It did not have permanent value. Spiritual prosperity, though, did have permanence. It could free an individual from the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. Pursuing spiritual goals would help in achieving '*moksha*'. Weber tries to show how it is this sort of 'other-worldly' ethic that worked against the rise of capitalism. Weber points out that medieval Indian cities were renowned centres of manufacture. Technology was at a fairly advanced level. Although material conditions were favourable, the Hindu religion made people de-emphasise material life.

Buddhism and Jainism, which tried to counter the rigidity of orthodox Hinduism, were according to Weber, pacifist or peace-emphasising religions. They were religions of contemplation and their followers were monks or people who rejected the world. The lay persons or ordinary followers could gain religious merit by offering alms to monks, but they could not achieve salvation through '*nirvana*' unless they gave up their occupations and became monks themselves.

The caste system, the religious beliefs of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism thus mutually reinforced each other and prevented the development of capitalism although medieval Indian cities were fertile ground for capitalism

to grow. India became a land of tradition, of a basically unshakeable social order (see Collins 1986: 111-118).

19.3.1 The Religion of China

Weber also wrote *The Religion of China* in 1916. Speaking of Confucianism, the traditional Chinese religion, Weber points out that like Protestantism, Confucianism too was marked by 'this worldly asceticism'. But whilst Protestantism sought to transform or attain mastery over the world, Confucianism emphasised harmony. The order of the world and the cosmos was to be maintained by carrying on the proper ceremonies that upheld the world order. Propriety in manners and behaviour was greatly stressed. The ruling classes, the Chinese 'mandarins' were the upholders of manners and morals. Maintaining social order meant that actively changing the world, an important aspect of capitalism, was discouraged. Thus, the Confucian ethic of propriety, restraint and harmony went against developing capitalism.

19.3.2 Ancient Judaism

Written between 1917 and 1919, this work of Weber is of crucial importance in understanding the changes that took place in the western world. Judaism is the seedbed from which the modern world-transforming religions of Islam and Christianity originated. As you have studied in Unit 16, Block 4 of this course, Judaism propagated the idea of creating a 'heaven on earth'. This idea has far-reaching implications. It encourages followers to actively transform the world and master it. The ethic of mastery over the environment is a key feature of modern western civilisation. The prophets of Judaism were ethical leaders who tried to unite their followers through their teachings. These prophets preached to the discontented and oppressed peasant classes of Palestine that the anger of God would destroy the land. They said that god was angry with the ruling classes living in the cities because of their sinful life-styles and their degenerate ways. Unless these groups were overthrown and a society that went according to the ways of god was established, Palestine could not hope to prosper. The existence of 'ethical prophets' who preach a certain programme of action is a characteristic feature of religions like Islam and Christianity as well. Weber's work on Christianity and Islam could not be completed. His death in 1920 prevented him from realising his plan of putting together his findings on the great world religions and using them to find an answer regarding the birth and growth of capitalism.

Activity 2

Collect some information about Prophet Mohammad and Jesus Christ. Write a note of about two pages covering (a) their life-histories, (b) their teachings (c) the impact of their teachings.

You may have found this section a repetition of Unit 16, Block 4 of this course. But the purpose has been to bring out Weber's central concern in his study of religion, namely, highlighting the relationship between religious ideas and human activity. Remember, Weber tries to interpret human action in terms of its meaningfulness to the actors themselves. Why would an

untouchable not rebel against the caste system in ancient India? Weber's explanation would have been to show that it was the religious belief system that prevented the person from trying to transform the world. Similarly, it was the doctrine of 'pre-destination' and 'calling' that made the Protestant work hard and accumulate money. Weber's approach to the study of religion has been drawn upon by several American and Indian sociologists.

Weber's study of religion brings out the role of prophets. He also shows how religious beliefs are connected with particular strata of society. Thus Confucianism is primarily connected with the ruling class, the 'mandarins', Hinduism is linked with the Brahmin orthodoxy trying to perpetuate the caste system; and Judaism is linked with a discontented peasantry striving to overcome oppression.

Having gone over the central arguments of Durkheim and Weber, it will be interesting to compare their perspectives. This is exactly what we will do in the next section after completing Check Your Progress 3.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Complete the following sentences.
 - a) According to Weber, the central belief in Hinduism is
 - b) The Hindu ideal was aspiring towards
 - c) Capitalism did not develop in China because of the Confucian ideal of
 - d) The ethic of is a key feature of modern western civilisation.
 - e) Weber tries to interpret human action in terms of its

19.4 DURKHEIM AND WEBER — A COMPARISON

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

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

19.4.1 Units of Analysis

As you have studied in the first section (19.2), Emile Durkheim studies religion in what he believes is its most elementary form. He focuses on tribal society where collective life is pervasive. Ideas are held in common by all individuals and there is an intensity of shared ideas and feelings. This is a society without written historical records. Religion and clan organisation overlap. Thus Durkheim emphasises the role of religion as a collective phenomenon which serves to strengthen social bonds.

Weber, on the other hand, studies the major features of the great world religions. He is interested in their historical roots and their capacity to guide and shape economic activity. These world religions are also seen as responses to the prevailing social situations. For instance, Buddhism and Jainism in India hit out against the caste system. Judaism was the religion of the oppressed Palestinian peasantry. Protestantism as you have seen in Unit 16, Block 4 of the course was a “protest” against the decadence of the orthodox Catholic Church. Thus, Durkheim’s emphasis on tribal religion visualises the role of religion in maintaining social order, Weber’s analysis looks at the creative role of religion in helping to shape new ways of thinking and acting.

19.4.1 The Role of Religion

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

Weber, in contrast, wishes to understand religion in relation to economic, political and historical factors. How does it interact with other institutions of society? How does society shape and is in turn shaped by religious beliefs? Weber is interested in the unique culture patterns to be found in each society. He sees religion as part and parcel of a larger historical trend, namely, the move towards capitalism, industrialisation and **rationality**. He is concerned with the role of religion in making the world-view of individuals in different societies favourably or unfavourably inclined towards capitalism and **rationalisation**. We will take up this point in greater detail in Unit 21 of this Block.

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

Activity 3

Locate the following on a world map: (a) India, (b) China, (c) Palestine (d) Australia.

19.4.3 Gods, Spirits and Prophets

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

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

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

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

19.4.4 Religion and Science

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

Comparing the views of these authors is not an easy task. They are dealing with such vastly different societies that their findings are bound to be different. But some points do emerge. Durkheim sees religion as a means whereby individuals acknowledge the physical and moral power of society. Religion is a way of classifying and ordering concepts and is thus the fore-runner of science. Weber studies religion in terms of its meanings for those who follow it, and how these meanings help them orient their actions in other social activities. Science arises as a challenge to religious ideas, driving out ghosts and spirits and replacing them with empirical observations and factual information. You can illustrate the difference between perspectives on religion, advanced by Durkheim and Weber as shown in figure 19.1

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

Fig. 19.1 Perspectives on religion

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Complete the following sentences.
 - a) Durkheim sees the role of religion in whilst Weber sees it in
 - b) are examples of ethical prophets.
 - c) Spirits and gods according to Weber are reflections of
 - d) Science, as Weber views it, is an expression of and a challenge to
 - e) Science, according to Weber replaces ghosts and spirits with

19.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to see how Emile Durkheim and Max Weber dealt with religion as a social phenomenon. We first tried to understand the views of Durkheim. We saw how and why he studied 'elementary forms' in simple societies. We examined how he arrived at his definition of religion,

how he understood totemism as an expression of clan worship and how he saw the continuity between religious and scientific thought.

Next we dealt with the work of Max Weber. We did not separately examine his 'Protestant ethic' thesis but we did make references to it. We saw how he treated the religions of India, China and ancient Palestine. We saw how his studies established links between religion and other social sub-systems, particularly in the context of the emergence of capitalism.

Finally, we compared the views of Durkheim and Weber in terms of the kinds of societies that they studied, the role they ascribed to religion, the concepts they used in their studies and their conflicting views on religion and science.

19.6 KEYWORDS

Apotheosis	Glorification, raising to a divine level
Calling	Regarding work as more than just an economic necessity, but a religious duty
Church	In the sense that Durkheim uses it, Church refers to a unified moral community sharing the same religious beliefs and practises
Clan exogamy	A kinship rule, which forbids marriage within the clan. Marriage partners must be members of another clan.
Collective effervescence	A collective feeling of enthusiasm and excitement, which serves to strengthen bonds between individuals who feel proud to be members of the same society.
Collective representations	Durkheim uses this term to denote the ideas, thoughts and concepts of a group which result from shared perceptions, e.g., ideas of beauty, truth, right, wrong etc.
Ethical prophets	These are persons who give people a powerful message, usually a religious one. They usually call for an overthrow of an existing social order, which they regard as evil and give their followers an alternative which they often claim has been revealed to them by god. Religions like Judaism, Islam and Christianity are 'prophetic' religions.
Empirical	Based on observed facts
Magic	An activity through which individuals try to manipulate nature for positive or negative reasons. It is found in almost all simple societies and persists even in more complex ones.

Pre-destination

The Calvinist (Protestant) belief that individuals are 'elected' to go to heaven not because of their own efforts, but due to the will of god which can neither be known nor influenced.

Religion: Durkheim and Weber

Rationality/rationalisation

Rationality in Weber's usage refers to a unique trend in Western Europe. It refers to the attempt at making human life more controlled by making it methodical and regularised. Human beings no longer see themselves as victims of the environment but as masters or controllers of it.

Sacred and profane

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

Totemism

A religion in which an animal, plant or some object is held as sacred and from which the group claims descent.

19.7 FURTHER READING

Aron, Raymond 1970. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vols. 1 and 2, Penguin Books: London, (see the sections on Durkheim and Weber).

Collins, Randall 1986. *Max Weber: A Skeleton Key*. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills.

Jones, Robert Alun 1986. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills.

19.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i)
 - a) this would help him understand the complex, organised religions
 - b) beliefs and rituals
 - c) mundane, ordinary aspects of day-to-day existence.
- ii) Durkheim distinguishes between magic and religion by pointing out that magic is a private, selfish practice. It is performed at the individual level for some selfish interests. Nature is sought to be manipulated for individual gains. The bond is only between the magician and the client. In religion, on the other hand, people are united by their faith. Religion is public and social, and followers lead a common life.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Members of the clan believe themselves to have descended from a common ancestor. They may not be blood relatives, but they share the same name and totem. Hence they cannot inter-marry.
- ii) Society exerts physical and moral force and authority on the individuals. It is 'sui-generis' and has a reality of its own. Hence it is worshipped.
- iii) Both religion and science contribute to the collective representations of society. Both seek universal principles which will help people lead lives that are both, individual and social. Since religion and science both seek the same goals, they cannot be in conflict.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) the doctrine of karma
 - b) *moksha*
 - c) harmony
 - d) mastery over the environment
 - e) meaningfulness to actors

Check Your Progress 4

- i)
 - a) maintaining social order, helping to shape new ways of thinking and acting.
 - b) Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed
 - c) Symbolic thought
 - d) rationality, traditional and mystical claims of religion
 - e) empirical observations and factual information.

UNIT 20 DIVISION OF LABOUR —

DURKHEIM AND MARX

Division of Labour –
Durkheim and Marx

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Socio-Economic Setting and Meaning of ‘Division of Labour’
 - 20.2.0 Socio-economic Setting
 - 20.2.1 Meaning of Division of Labour
- 20.3 Durkheim’s Views on Division of Labour
 - 20.3.0 Functions of Division of Labour
 - 20.3.1 Causes of Division of Labour
 - 20.3.2 Abnormal Forms of Division of Labour
- 20.4 Marx’s Views on Division of Labour
 - 20.4.0 Social Division of Labour and Division of Labour in Manufacture
 - 20.4.1 Implications of Division of Labour in Manufacture
 - 20.4.2 Marx’s Remedy - Revolution and Change
- 20.5 A Comparison
 - 20.5.0 Causes of Division of Labour
 - 20.5.1 Consequences of Division of Labour
 - 20.5.2 Solutions to the Problems Related to Division of Labour
 - 20.5.3 Durkheim’s ‘Functional Model’ of Society and Marx’s ‘Conflict Model’
- 20.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.7 Key Words
- 20.8 Further Reading
- 20.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

20.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- describe Emile Durkheim’s views on division of labour as expressed in his work *The Division of Labour in Society*
- outline Karl Marx’s views on division of labour
- compare the distinct views of Durkheim and Marx on division of labour.

20.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you are going to study the similarities and differences in the manner in which Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx treated the process of “division of labour”.

To begin with, we will briefly describe the socio-economic setting in which Durkheim and Marx expressed their views. We will then explain the concept of division of labour. This will be the first section (20.2).

In the second section (20.3) we will study the views of Emile Durkheim on division of labour which he put across in his Ph.D. thesis entitled *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893).

We will go on to study Karl Marx's analysis of the topic in the third section (20.4).

Finally in the fourth section (20.5), we will compare and contrast the positions of these founding fathers.

20.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC SETTING AND MEANING OF DIVISION OF LABOUR

In the following sub-sections we shall first describe the socio-economic setting in which Durkheim and Marx worked. This will help us understand their views better. We shall then see exactly what is meant by the term 'division of labour'. What does it involve? Why is it practised? These are some of the points we will tackle in this section.

20.2.0 Socio-Economic Setting

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

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

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

Let us now understand what division of labour means.

20.2.1 Meaning of Division of Labour

By the phrase of 'division of labour' we mean the splitting up of an activity into a number of parts or smaller processes. These smaller processes are undertaken by different persons or groups of persons, thereby speeding up the performance of the activity. Let us take an example. You want to make a shirt. It will take you quite some time to do the entire job yourself. If, however, some friends decide to join you, the job can be simplified. One person may do the cutting, another may do the machine-stitching, a third

may do the finishing stitches by hand. This will save you a great deal of time and energy. You and your friends can probably make many more shirts in the same time it would take you alone to make a single shirt. You have divided labour and hence saved time and increased productivity. Division of labour implies specialisation, (i.e., each person becoming an expert in his or her task) saving time and saving costs and at the same time increasing productivity.

The concept of division of labour was systematically discussed by the Scottish economist Adam Smith in his work *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith felt that the division of labour was the primary source of economic progress. It was the vehicle through which economic development would advance. You may read more about Adam Smith in Box 20.1.

Box 20.1 Adam Smith

Adam Smith is regarded as one of the pioneers of modern economics. He was born in 1723 in Kirkcaldy, a small town near Edinburgh, Scotland. After his early schooling in Kirkcaldy, Adam Smith went on to the University of Edinburgh where he was awarded an M.A. in 1740. He then went to Oxford. In 1751, Smith was appointed a professor of moral philosophy in the University of Glasgow. During his tenure, which lasted until 1763, Smith produced his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

Smith began work on his, magnum opus, *The Wealth of Nations* after a two-year stay in Europe. There, he met a number of philosophers, notably the great Frenchman Voltaire, all of whom exerted a profound impact on him. *The Wealth of Nations* was published in March 1776. In this book, he tried to study the history, causes and limitations of economic “progress” or development. Adam Smith saw the basic source of development in the individual’s desire to improve economic status. Smith identified division of labour as the process which helped accelerate economic development. Smith used an impressive collection of economic data, which he gathered from his wide readings and sharp observations. Some of this data is referred to by economists even today. *The Wealth of Nations* remains one of the most important works in social science because it was one of the first attempts to study comprehensively the competitive, individualistic world of industrial capitalism. This book also contained an evaluation and sharp criticism of existing society and government. Smith strongly opposed government intervention in economic matters. In his opinion, human beings should be free to pursue their economic goals. This would lead not just to personal gains, but the benefit of society as a whole.

After the publication of this book, Smith settled in Edinburgh. He died on July 17th, 1790. He is remembered as one of the important figures in the history of economic thought.

We have so far discussed the meaning of the term in an economic sense. Division of labour has a social side as well. It is the social aspect of this phenomenon that Emile Durkheim examines in *The Division of Labour in Society*. Let us now describe the main points made in this work.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill up the blanks in the following sentences.
 - a) The Industrial Revolution marked a change from..... production of commodities toproduction in factories.
 - b) was becoming more conspicuous with the advance of industrialisation.
 - c) said that division of labour was the primary source of economic development
- ii) State whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F)
 - a) Division of labour leads to wastage to time. (T/F)
 - b) Durkheim wanted to study the economic aspect of division of labour T/F
 - c) Division of labour leads to specialisation T/F

20.3 DURKHEEVTS VIEWS ON DIVISION OF LABOUR

Durkheim's major concern as a sociologist as we have already seen in Unit 18 of this Block is the theme of social order and integration. What holds society together? What keeps it in an integrated whole? Let us first see what Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, Durkheim's predecessors had to say about it.

Auguste Comte suggests that it is social and moral **consensus** that holds society together. Common ideas, values, norms and mores bind individuals and society together.

Herbert Spencer puts across a different view. According to Spencer, it is an interplay of individual interests that holds society together. It serves the selfish interests of individuals to strive for integration. Thus social life is possible.

Durkheim was at variance with these views. If, as Comte suggests, it is moral consensus that holds society together, then would not modern industrial society crumble? After all, modern society is characterised by heterogeneity, mobility, and diversity in activities and values. It is a society where individualism is valued. Spencer's suggestion that selfish interests hold society together was also found to be faulty by Durkheim. If indeed, individual interests hold sway, the resulting competition and antagonism would break the backbone of society. Each would struggle for his own profit even at the expense of the other. Conflict and tension would bring about social disintegration.

The question that arises is, is individualism the natural enemy of social integration and solidarity? Would the Industrial Revolution lead to nothing but the destruction of social bonds? Durkheim thinks otherwise.

According to him, the basis or focus of social integration differs in pre-industrial and post-industrial societies. He demonstrates how the process of occupational specialisation or division of labour helps to integrate societies where heterogeneity, differentiation and complexity are to be found. These societies, as you have already studied in Block 3 are those based on organic solidarity. In the following sub-sections we will see how Durkheim studies division of labour in terms of

- 1) the function of division of labour
- 2) the causes underlying division of labour
- 3) deviations from the normal type of division of labour, i.e. abnormal forms.

20.3.0 Functions of Division of Labour

As you have already studied, Durkheim classifies human societies into

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

i) Mechanical Solidarity

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

ii) Organic Solidarity

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

Societies based on organic solidarity are touched and transformed by the growth of industrialisation. Thus, division of labour is a very important aspect of such societies. A society based on organic solidarity is thus one where heterogeneity, differentiation and variety exist. The growing complexity of societies reflects in personality types, relationships and

problems. In such societies, the strength of the collective conscience lessens, as individual conscience becomes more and more distinct, more easily distinguished from the collective conscience. Individualism becomes increasingly valued. The kind of grip that social norms have on individuals in mechanical solidarity loosens. Individual autonomy and personal freedom become as important in organic solidarity as social solidarity and integration in societies characterised by mechanical solidarity.

Does this mean that modern society has nothing to integrate it? Division of labour, says Durkheim, is the process that will help keep society integrated. How? Well, as we have already seen, division of labour implies working together at certain tasks, in other words, it implies cooperation. As work becomes more and more divided, two consequences can be seen. On the one hand, each individual becomes specialised in his field. He can exercise his initiative and creativity in his special field. On the other hand, each individual grows to depend more intimately on society. Cooperation and complementarity are the watchwords of such a society. The kind of solidarity produced, namely organic solidarity, is of a higher order than mechanical solidarity. It allows individuals to exercise their freedom and initiative even while binding them to each other and to society. Thus, the process, which helps the growth of both, individualism and social integration, is division of labour. At this point it is a good idea to complete Activity 1 in order to appreciate the concept of division of labour. We would then look at Durkheim's answer to the question posed above.

Activity 1

How is labour divided in the household? Write a note of about two pages covering the following points (i) nature and allocation of tasks, (ii) the extent to which division of labour helps or hinders smooth functioning of the household.

Let us now examine in this case the causes of division of labour as described by Durkheim.

20.3.1 Causes of Division of Labour

What leads to the process, of division of labour or, what are the causal factors? Durkheim provides a sociological answer to this question. According to him, division of labour arises as a result of increased material and moral density in society. By material density Durkheim means the sheer increase in the number of individuals in a society, in other words, population growth. By moral density he means the increased interaction that results between individuals as a consequence of growth in numbers.

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

20.3.2 Abnormal Forms of Division of Labour

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

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

1) **Anomie**

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

To put it simply, individuals are working and producing but fail to see any meaning in what they are doing. For instance, in a factory assembly-line workers have to spend the whole day doing boring, routine activities like fixing screws or nails to a piece of machinery. They fail to see any meaning in what they do. They are not made to feel that they are doing anything useful, they are not made to feel an important part of society. Norms and rules governing work in a factory have not changed to the extent that they can make the worker's activities more meaningful or show the workers that society needs and values them.

2) **Inequality**

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

3) **Inadequate organisation**

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

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

Durkheim however describes this as deviations from the normal type. He terms these as (1) **anomie**, wherein new rules and norms governing division of labour do not arise, (2) inequality, which results in discontent, tension and conflict and (3) inadequate organisation, which makes division of labour meaningless, producing disunity and disintegration.

Let us now move on to the next section and study the views of Karl Marx on division of labour. But before that, do check your progress.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) State whether the following statements are true or false
 - a) Auguste Comte explained social integration in terms of individual interests. T/F
 - b) Durkheim agreed that moral consensus was what held modern industrial society together. T/F
 - c) According to Durkheim, individualism and social integration were natural enemies. T/F
 - d) The collective conscience becomes stronger in organic solidarity according to Durkheim. T/F

- ii) Answer the following in about five sentences each.
 - a) Why is organic solidarity of a higher order than mechanical solidarity, according to Durkheim?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
 - b) How do material and moral density lead to division of labour?
.....
.....
.....

-
-
- c) What did Durkheim mean by “anomie”?
-
-
-

20.4 MARX’S VIEWS ON DIVISION OF LABOUR

In the following sub-sections we shall try to understand

- i) the distinction made by Marx between social division of labour and division of labour in industry or manufacture.
- ii) the implications of division of labour in manufacture.
- iii) Marx’s remedy to the problems created by division of labour, namely, revolution and change.

20.4.0 Social Division of Labour and Division of Labour in Manufacture

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

- 1) **Social division of labour:** This exists in all societies. It is a process that is bound to exist in order that members of a society may successfully undertake the tasks that are necessary to maintain social and economic life. It is a complex system of dividing all the useful forms of labour in a society. For instance, some individuals produce food, some produce handicrafts, weapons and so on. Social division of labour promotes the process of exchange of goods between groups, e.g., the earthenware pots produced by a potter may be exchanged for a farmer’s rice or a weaver’s cloth (see Figure 20.1: Social Division of Labour). Such exchanges spur on or provide an impetus to specialisation.

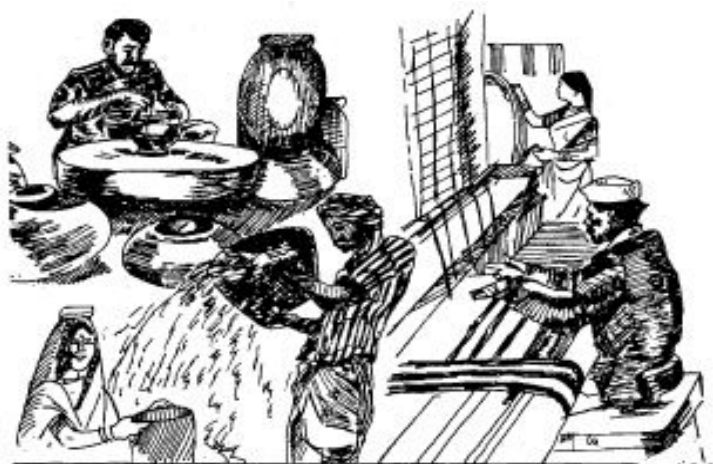


Figure 20.1 Social Division of Labour

- 2) **Division of labour in industry or manufacture:** This is a process, which is prevalent in industrial societies where capitalism and the factory system exist. In this process, manufacture of a commodity is broken into a number of processes. Each worker is limited to performing or engaging in a small process like work in an **assembly line** (see Figure 20.2: Division of Labour in Manufacture). This is usually boring, monotonous and repetitive work. The purpose of this division of labour is simple; it is to increase productivity. The greater the productivity the greater the **surplus value** generated. It is generation of surplus value that motivates capitalists to organise manufacture in a manner that maximises output and minimises costs. It is division of labour, which makes mass production of goods possible in modern, industrial societies. Unlike social division of labour where independent producers create products and exchange them with other independent producers, division of labour in manufacture completely divorces the worker from his product. Let us examine this point in more detail by trying to understand the implications of division of labour in manufacture.



Figure 20.2 Division of Labour in Manufacture

20.4.1 Implications of Division of Labour in Manufacture

1) Profits accrue to the capitalist

As earlier described, division of labour in manufacture help to generate more and more surplus value leading to capital accumulation. Marx tackles a crucial question, namely, who takes away the profits? Not the workers, says Marx, but the capitalists. Not those who actually produce, but those who own the means of production. According to him, division of labour and the existence of private property together consolidate the power of the capitalist. Since the capitalist owns the means of production, the production process is designed and operated in such a way that the capitalist benefits the most from it.

2) **Workers lose control over what they produce**

According to Marx with division of labour in manufacture workers tend to lose their status as the real creators of goods. Rather, they become mere links in a production chain designed and operated by the capitalists. Workers are separated from the products of their labour; in fact, they hardly ever see the end result of their work. They have no control over its sale and purchase. For example, does a worker in an assembly line in a factory producing washing-machines really get to see the finished product? He/she might see it in an advertisement or at a shop window. The worker will not be able to sell it or afford to buy it, having been merely a small part of the production of that machine. The actual control over it is exercised by the capitalist. The worker as an independent producer no longer exists. The worker has become enslaved by the production process.

3) **Dehumanisation of the Working Class**

The capitalist system characterised by division of labour is one where workers stop being independent producers of goods. They become suppliers of labour-power, which is needed for production. The worker's individual personality needs and desires mean nothing to the capitalist. It is only the worker's labour-power which is sold to the capitalist in exchange for wages that concerns the capitalist. The working class is thus stripped of its humanness and labour-power becomes a mere commodity purchased by the capitalist, in Marx's view.

4) **Alienation**

One of the important concepts developed by Marx in understanding the realities of the industrial world is that of alienation. You have already studied this in Block 2.

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

Activity 2

Observe the process of division of labour in a factory or a cottage industry. Jot down your findings in about two pages and compare them, if possible with the other students at your Study Centre.

20.4.2 Marx's Remedy - Revolution and Change

Can the problems of loss of control, dehumanisation and alienation be countered? For Marx it is the abolition of private property, and the establishment of a classless society is the way out. Are labourers forced to be enslaved by the production process? Is division of labour forever to be imposed on them, restricting their creativity and control over their work?

Marx holds that social division of labour has to exist in order that the material conditions of human life may be met. But it is division of labour

in production that has to be reorganised. It is only when private property is abolished through the revolution of the proletariat that the workers can gain freedom from the alienative division of labour that has been thrust upon them.

The establishment of a communist society according to Marx will enable workers to own and control the means of production. The reorganised production process will enable each individual to realise his/her potential and exercise creativity. Marx and Engels describe their vision in the following words:

“In communist society where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic” (*German Ideology*, Vol. I, Sect. IAI).

In the above discussion, we saw how Marx distinguished between social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture. Social division of labour is essential for the basis of material life in all societies. Division of labour in manufacture, however, comes into existence with the development of industrialisation and capitalism.

The existence of division of labour in manufacture has the following implications, namely,

- 1) Profits accrue to the capitalist.
- 2) Workers lose control over what they produce.
- 3) Dehumanisation of the working class takes place.
- 4) Alienation takes place at all levels.

In order to handle these problems, Marx preaches the ‘revolution of the proletariat’, which will do away with private property and transfer the ownership of the means of production in the hands of the workers. This will result in the production process being designed and operated by the workers themselves, enabling workers to give scope to their creativity, and excel at a variety of tasks. They will not be forced into a boring exploitative routine.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Answer the following questions in three lines each.
 - a) What did Marx mean by “social division of labour?”

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

- b) “Workers lose control over their products as a result of division of labour in manufacture.” Explain this statement.

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

ii) Tick the correct alternative.

- a) According to Marx, the working class becomes dehumanised because

- i) machines are introduced in factories.
- ii) the working class is regarded only as a supplier of “labour power”.
- iii) workers cannot buy the goods they produce.

- b) Workers become alienated from production because

- i) they are engaged in monotonous work.
- ii) they do not share the profits and have no control over their production.
- iii) they sell their labour-power for wages.

- c) The communist revolution would result in

- i) complete abolition of division of labour.
- ii) no change in division of labour in manufacture.
- iii) a production process designed and operated by the workers themselves.

20.5 A COMPARISON

We have separately studied the views of Durkheim and Marx on division of labour. Let us now compare their views. To make this comparison easier, we shall compare their views on division of labour under the following headings viz.

- i) Causes of division of labour
- ii) Consequences of division of labour
- iii) Solutions to the problems related to division of labour
- iv) Durkheim’s ‘Functional’ model of society and Marx’s ‘Conflict’ model.

20.5.0 Causes of Division of Labour

Both, Durkheim and Marx make a very clear distinction between division of labour in simple societies and complex industrial societies. Division of labour is an inevitable and necessary aspect of the socio-economic life of

any society. But they are more concerned and interested in the division of labour that takes place in industrial societies.

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

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

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

20.5.1 Consequences of Division of Labour

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

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

Marx on the other hand sees division of labour as a process imposed on workers by capitalists. Its consequences, as we have already studied, are that it leads to dehumanisation of the work force. Alienation results. Workers

are reduced to things. Their creativity, their control over their creation is taken away. Their labour becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold at the market place. Thus they become mere parts of the production process rather than the producers themselves. Their personalities, their problems mean nothing to their employers. They are regarded as nothing more than work-machines. Thus they are literally dehumanised. Being part of a system they cannot control, they suffer from alienation at all levels; from their work, their fellow-workers and the social system itself.

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

20.5.2 Solutions to the Problems Related to Division of Labour

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

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

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

20.5.3 Durkheim’s ‘Functional Model’ of Society and Marx’s ‘Conflict Model’

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

Marx responds quite differently to the challenges thrown up by industrialisation. He does not share Durkheim’s view that society is basically in a state of equilibrium and that social institutions and processes exist

only because they help to integrate society. Marx views human history as a history of class struggle, or a series of struggles between the oppressors and the oppressed. Capitalism is a phase in human history marked by the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The system of production that exists under capitalism is designed to exploit the workers. The interests of the workers conflict with those of the capitalists. The revolution of the proletariat, Marx believes, will overthrow the old system and bring in the new. Contradictions, conflict and change are the key-words in Marx’s understanding of society.

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

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Arrange the serial numbers of the following statements under the appropriate headings:

DURKHEIM’S VIEWS

MARX’S VIEWS

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- a) Division of labour is exploitative.
- b) Division of labour leads to cooperation.
- c) Division of labour is conducive to social integration.
- d) Division of labour strips the worker of all control.
- e) Division of labour is a feature of the modern capitalist world.
- f) The problems of the industrial world are abnormal forms.
- g) The problem of the industrial world is capitalism itself.
- h) Division of labour based on inequality will create problems in society.

- ii) Distinguish between Durkheim’s functionalism and Marx conflict model in their treatment of the topic ‘division of labour’. Answer in eight lines.

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20.6 LET US SUM UP

We first studied the meaning of the term “division of labour”. We then studied the views of Emile Durkheim on division of labour. These views were put across in his work *Division of Labour in Society*. The main points expressed in this book were organised under the following headings

- 1) Functions of division of labour
- 2) Causes of division of labour
- 3) Abnormal forms.

We then dealt with the views of Karl Marx on division of labour. We saw the difference he made between social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture. We studied the implications of division of labour in manufacture, namely, how

- 1) profits accrue to the capitalist.
- 2) workers lose control over what they produce.
- 3) dehumanisation of the working class takes place.
- 4) alienation takes place at all levels.

We then described Marx’s remedy for this situation, namely, revolution which would establish a communist society where each individual could develop his/her creative powers.

Finally, we compared the views of Durkheim and Marx under the following headings

- 1) Causes of division of labour
- 2) Consequences of division of labour
- 3) Solutions to the problems related to division of labour
- 4) Durkheim’s functional model of society and Marx’s conflict model.

20.7 KEYWORDS

Assembly line	A feature of the modern factory system wherein workers assemble or put together the various parts of a commodity or perform certain operations on it. Each has a specific task to do. This speeds up production.
Anomie	This term is used by Durkheim to convey a situation in which the individual does not feel integrated in society. Social norms and values seem unclear and unintegrated and the individual does not feel morally involved with the affairs of society.
Complementary	Something that helps, supports e.g. the role of a nurse is complementary to that of a doctor.
Consensus	Agreement amongst the members of society regarding social norms, values, allocation of roles and rewards. Consensus helps to maintain social order.
Conflict model of society	This is a way of looking at society which stresses on the tensions which mark society, rather than social order. According to Marx, the social relations of production are the basis of tensions and conflict.
Functional model of society	This way of looking a society stresses on social order and studies how different social institutions and sub-systems function or contribute to maintaining social order.
Heterogeneous	Opposite of 'homogeneous': This means variety, different types, e.g. India has a heterogeneous population, i.e. a variety of races, languages, religions, customs, etc.
Surplus value	When a worker applies his labour power to raw materials, they are converted into commodities. A certain value is added by the worker to the materials. The value created is greater than what is paid to the worker as wages. This difference between the value created and the wage received is called 'surplus value'. Marx says this surplus value is appropriated by the capitalist.

20.8 FURTHER READING

Aron, Raymond 1970. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vols. 1 and 2. Penguin Books: London, (see the sections on Marx and Durkheim)

Bottomore, Tom (Ed.) 1983. *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Blackwell: Oxford.

Giddens, Anthony 1978. *Durkheim*. Harvester Press: Hassocks

20.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) Small-scale, domestic large-scale, mass
b) Division of labour
c) Adam Smith
- ii) a) F
b) F
c) T

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) F
b) F
c) F
d) F
- ii) a) mechanical solidarity is a solidarity of resemblance. Organic solidarity is based on differences and complementarity of differences. Thus individuals can be innovative and at the same time need to depend on each other and on society. So individualism and social integration can exist together. Durkheim therefore feels that organic solidarity is a higher form of solidarity.
- b) Material and moral density help the members of a society come into close contact with each other. A struggle for existence and for scarce resources may come about. In order that they may coexist, individuals specialise in separate fields and division of labour takes place. Thus material and moral density lead to division of labour according to Durkheim.
- c) Anomie, according to Durkheim, is 'pathological' or abnormal. It refers to a situation where norms and rules seem to have broken down. In the sphere of work, for example, individuals have to work and produce but there are no new norms governing them. They fail to see any meaning or purpose in their activity.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) a) Social division of labour is a complex system of dividing all the useful forms of labour in society. Some people may produce food, others handicraft etc. It promotes exchange of goods and is necessary to maintain social and economic life.
- b) Division of labour in manufacture makes the worker a small part of the production process. The worker does not have anything to do with the product. He/she cannot sell it and often cannot buy it, and thus becomes a slave, not a master of the process of production of goods.
- ii) a) ii b) i c) iii

Check Your Progress 4

i)

Durkheim's Views	Marx's Views
b)	A0
c)	d)
e)	e)
f)	g)
h)	

- ii) By Emile Durkheim's "functional" model of society we mean the way in which he studied the contributions of social institutions and processes in maintaining social integration. In keeping with this model, he studied division of labour not just as an economic process but as a social one. He tried to show how it contributed to social integration.

Karl Marx, on the other hand saw society in terms of contradictions, conflict and change. Human history is marked by the oppression of one group by another. Division of labour is one of the processes through which capitalists oppress workers. This reflects his 'conflict' model of society.

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Karl Marx on Capitalism
 - 21.2.0 Capitalism — A Stage in Human History
 - 21.2.1 Main Features of Capitalism
 - 21.2.2 Capitalism and Class Conflict
- 21.3 Max Weber on Capitalism
 - 21.3.0 Weber on Rationality
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- 21.4 Marx and Weber — A Comparison
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 - 21.4.2 Consequences of Capitalism and Remedy for Change
- 21.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.6 Keywords
- 21.7 Further Reading
- 21.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

21.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to

- summarise the views of Karl Marx on capitalism as a stage in history
- outline Max Weber’s views on capitalism
- understand the similarities and differences in their analysis of capitalism.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

All through this course, you have been familiarised with the socio-economic context, in which the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology have worked and produced their enduring contributions to our subject.

You have seen how the period of history, in which they lived and worked, was marked by tremendous social change. The challenges and problems

of the rapidly changing world reflect in the way they handled various issues and topics.

In Unit 20 we saw how Emile Durkheim and Max Weber tackled the topic of 'division of labour'. In this unit, we shall try and understand how Karl Marx and Max Weber treated or understood capitalism.

In the first section (21.2), we shall outline the views of Karl Marx. In the next section (21.3), we shall see how Max Weber approached the issue. In the final section (21.4), we shall try and see how their ideas converged and diverged.

21.2 KARL MARX ON CAPITALISM

As you have already studied in Block 2, Karl Marx maintains that economic activity and the economic structure is the basis on which social life rests. The economic base or infrastructure comprises a certain mode of production and certain forces and relations of production. The mode of production is not the same everywhere and at all times; it changes during the course of human history. Marx and Engels outline certain stages of world history each characterised by a distinctive economic formation. It is this economic formation that shapes other social sub-systems, which are termed as superstructure like the political structure, religion, values and culture. In German Ideology, Marx and Engels broadly outline four stages of history. These are (i) the primitive communal stage, (ii) the ancient stage based on slavery, (iii) the feudal stage, (iv) the capitalist stage. The study of human history in terms of stages each with its own distinct mode of production forms the basis of the Marxian theory of historical materialism.

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

21.2.0 Capitalism: A Stage in Human History

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

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

inherent in capitalist society will set the stage for the development of Marx's ideal society, the communist society which will be free of the contradictions and tensions of the earlier stages.

21.2.1 Main Features of Capitalism

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

1) **Production for sale rather than for self-use**

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

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

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

3) **Exchange takes place through money**

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

4) **The capitalist controls the production process**

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

5) **The capitalist controls financial decisions**

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

6) Competition

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

This leads to further concentration and centralisation of capital in a few hands.

Capitalism thus is a system, which according to Marx symbolises the most acute form of exploitation, inequality and **polarisation of classes**. By this is meant that the social distance between the owners of the means of production (i.e., the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat) becomes greater and greater. The concept of class conflict is very important in Marx’s understanding of capitalism. In order to enhance your understanding of the main features of capitalism, it is a good idea to complete Activity 1.

Activity 1

Go over the sub-section on the main features of capitalism (21.2.2) carefully. Can you observe these features in your society? To what extent? Write down your observations in about one page and compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

21.2.2 Capitalism and Class Conflict

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

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

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

Briefly, Karl Marx views capitalism as one of the stages in human history, which emerges out of the contradictions of the previous stage. Capitalism

too, is beset with inner contradictions. It is a stage in which class conflict is at its greatest intensity. After all, the means of production are concentrated in a few hands. The labour force is considered only in terms of its labour-power, which can be bought and sold for a price namely, wages. The inequalities of the system lead to polarisation of classes.

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

Let us now complete check your progress 1 and then study Weber’s views on capitalism.

Check Your Progress 1

i) State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F).

- a) According to Marx the stage which followed the primitive communal stage was the capitalist stage. T/F
- b) The capitalist stage is the only stage characterised by inner contradictions. T/F
- c) The capitalist economy is a subsistence economy. T/F
- d) Labourers in the capitalist system are obliged to work like the slaves and serfs. T/F
- e) As capitalism progresses, classes start coming closer together. T/F

ii) Answer the following in three sentences each.

a) Why did Karl Marx preach the ‘revolution of the proletariat’?

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b) Why do banks and financial institutions become important in the capitalist stage?

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c) Why does ‘polarisation of’ classes’ take place under capitalism?

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21.3 MAX WEBER ON CAPITALISM

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

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

21.3.0 Weber on 'Rationality'

To understand Max Weber's ideas regarding capitalism, it is important to first review his understanding of rationality. The growth of 'rationality' in the western world is closely connected with capitalism as you shall soon see. What did Weber mean by rationality and rationalisation? As you have already studied in Unit 17 of Block 4, rationality is a product of the scientific specialisation which is an important feature of western culture. It involves gaining mastery or control of the external world. It involves the organisation of human life in such a manner that greater efficiency and productivity can be attained.

Briefly, rationalisation means an attempt by humans to control the environment by organising and coordinating human activities in a certain regular and predictable manner. Events are not left to chance or to nature. Human beings have gained such a degree of understanding about the world around them that nature is no longer regarded as 'mysterious' or 'incalculable'. Through the use of science and technology, written rules and laws, human activity is systematised. Let us take an example from our day-to-day life. There is a vacancy in an office. One manner of filling the vacancy would be to appoint one's friend or relative. But this is not 'rational' in the Weberian sense. Another way would be to advertise in the newspapers, hold a competitive examination and an interview and select the candidate with the best result. In this method, certain rules and codes have been applied. A certain regularisation, which the first method did not have, has been introduced. Weber would call this an example of rationalisation.

21.3.1 Rationalisation and Western Civilisation

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

- 1) **Science**, a body of verifiable knowledge well developed in the west.
- 2) **A rational** state with specialised institutions, written laws and a constitution, which regulates political activity.

- 3) **Art** like western music, for example which has a system of notation, simultaneous use of a number of instruments and so on which are not be observed to the same extent in other systems of music. You may read more about Weber's analysis of rationality in western music in Box 21.1
- 4) **Economy** which is characterised by rational capitalism. We will study this in detail in the following sub-section.

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

Box 21.1: Rationalisation to Western Music

In 1911 Weber wrote a little book entitled *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*. In it, he analysed the development of western music in terms of its growing rationality. The scale in modern western music is divided into 'octaves' of twelve notes each. Tones have similar sounds at higher and lower octaves. This makes it possible for melodies to move back and forth in a cycle. Western music is also marked by 'polyvocality', i.e. a number of voices and/or instruments play the same tones together. According to Weber polyvocality which reflects in the 'orchestra' makes western music an organisation. Musicians have distinct roles, which are rationally combined and coordinated. Music thus becomes bureaucratised. Another feature is that western music is formally written down by using a system of notation. Composers write down their compositions and receive recognition for their work. They are acknowledged as creative artists and become role models for other musicians who try to equal and surpass them. Thus, western music is organised and methodical, dynamic and competitive. Composers are the entrepreneurs in the world of music

Let us now study how, according to Weber, 'rationalised economy' or 'rational capitalism' differed from other economic systems and how Weber described the socio-economic setting which would be conducive for the growth of capitalism.

21.3.2 Traditional and Rational Capitalism

In Unit 16 of Block 4 you have briefly studied the difference between 'traditional' capitalism and 'rational' capitalism. Does capitalism merely mean a system for the creation of profit? Is greed or desire for wealth the only characteristic of capitalism? In that case, capitalism existed in most parts of the world. It existed amongst the merchants of ancient Babylon, India and China and Medieval Europe with its powerful merchant guilds. But it was not 'rational' capitalism.

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

exorbitant rates. Business is a gamble. If successful, the gains are great and so are losses if business fails.

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

In short, traditional capitalism is restricted to a few producers, a few commodities and a few clients. The element of risk is high. Business is a gamble. Rational capitalism on the other hand, aims at making all goods marketable. It involves mass production and distribution. Business becomes methodical and regular. In the above discussion, we studied the difference between traditional and rational capitalism. What sort of socio-economic milieu can rational capitalism flourish in? Let us now complete check your progress 2 and then study the main characteristics or pre-conditions necessary for the development of rational capitalism.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Answer the following questions in four sentences each.

a) What does Weber mean by the term “rationalisation”?

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b) How business was conducted by traditional capitalists?

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

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

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

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

Let us now study how Weber explains the rise of the rationalisation of the economic system. What leads to the development of rational capitalism? You have seen, in the earlier section, how Karl Marx explains the rise of capitalism. Marx explains it in terms of a change in the mode of production. Does Max Weber view it in basically economic terms? Does he take into account other factors like cultural and political ones? As we shall see in the next sub-section, Weber views capitalism as too complex a phenomenon to be explained away by a single factor. The development of rational capitalism is spurred on by multiple factors, all acting and reacting with each other and producing a certain blend of features, which characterise rational capitalism. We shall be considering the economic, political and cultural or religious factors, which Weber discusses.

21.3.4 Factors Contributing to the Growth of Rational Capitalism

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

- i) **Economic Factors:** Weber mentions the gradual separation in Europe between the 'household' and 'trade' or business. The process of small-scale domestic production of items for self-consumption gives way to mass production in factories. The spheres of household activity and work become distanced. The growth of transport and communication also contributes to rationalisation of the economy. The use of a common currency and the practice of **book-keeping** make economic transactions easier.
- ii) **Political Factors:** The rise of modern western capitalism is closely connected with the growth of the bureaucratic rational-legal state. The idea of citizenship assumes prominence. Citizens are given certain legal rights and obligations. The **bureaucratic state** helps to break down feudalism and to free land and labour for the capitalist market. The bureaucratic state helps to pacify and politically control large territories. This provides a climate of relative political peace for business to be conducted smoothly. Rationalisation finds full expression in the rise of the bureaucratic state, which in turn contributes to the growth of rational capitalism.

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

But these explanations alone are not adequate, according to Weber. Human behaviour according to him is a reflection of the meanings human beings ascribe and ideas human beings have about their situation. Underlying human action is a certain ethos, a certain world-view, in keeping with which humans orient their activities. What was the **ethos** of the earliest Western capitalists? How did they view the world around them and how did they locate their own positions in it? Weber found out an interesting statistic, namely, that the majority of leading businessmen, professionals and bureaucrats of that time were Protestants. This led him to speculate on whether the teachings of Protestantism had any bearing on economic behaviour. His famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has already been discussed in detail in Unit 16, Block 4. Let us now first complete Activity 2 and then review the role of religious beliefs in shaping economic behaviour.

Activity 2

Read the above section carefully. Jot down the points of similarity that you observe between Weber's and Marx's understanding of the impact of economic factors on the development of capitalism. Write a note of about one page and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

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

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

21.3.5 The Future of the Rationalised Western World: The 'Iron Cage'

As we have seen in the above discussion, Weber views rationality as a key process of western civilisation. The rationalisation of economy, polity, cultures and day-to-day existence has important implications. Rationalisation leads to **disenchantment of the world**. Because science seems to have answers for almost everything, human beings lose their reverence and awe for the world. Rationalisation of day-to-day life traps human beings into routines. Life becomes mechanical, predictable and systematic and hence dull. This can have the effect of making human beings less creative and reluctant to break routines and schedules. Human beings get caught in a prison of their own making, an iron cage from which there seems to be no escape. Rational capitalism and its partner, the rational bureaucratic state,

perpetuate a certain life-style in which the roles of human beings are robbed of creativity and adventure. The world around us loses its charm. It reduces humans to automatons. Basically, it is an alienative system.

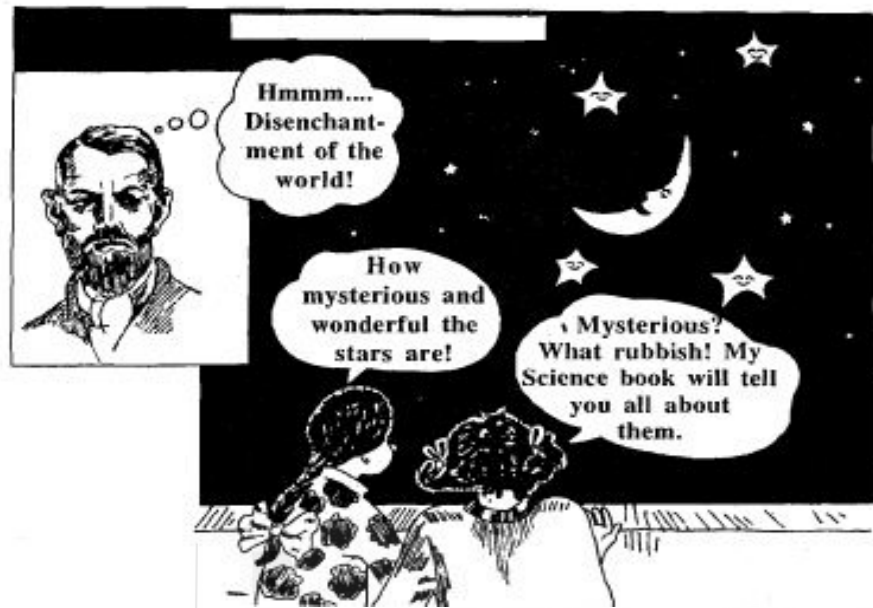


Figure 21.1: Weber's Vision of Future

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

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

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Answer the following in four sentences each.
 - a) Why was rational legislation necessary for the development of rational capitalism?

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b) How did the notion of ‘predestination’ influence the way in which Protestants worked?

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ii) State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F)

- a) The rise of the bureaucratic state was the single most important factor in the emergence of capitalism, according to Weber. T/F
- b) The idea ‘predestination’ made most Protestants lead a life devoted to prayer and the sacraments. T/F
- c) According to Weber, the rationalised Western world freed human beings from dull routines. T/F

21.4 MARX AND WEBER-A COMPARISON

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

21.4.0 Difference in Approach

In Unit 18 this Block, you studied how the methodology of these thinkers differed. Karl Marx, as you studied earlier, takes society as his unit of analysis. We have used the term social realism to describe this approach. In keeping with this, Marx describes capitalism as one of the historical stages through which society passes.

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

21.4.1 The Emergence of Capitalism

Marx sees the emergence of capitalism in terms of a shift in mode of production. To him, the economy or the material world is the infrastructure

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

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

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

Activity 3

'Marx put economy before religion and Weber put religion before economy'. Do you agree with this statement? Discuss it with your fellow-students and write a note of about a page to support your view.

21.4.2 Consequences of Capitalism and Remedy for Change

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Fill in the blanks with suitable words.
 - a) Marx takes as his unit of analysis. This approach is known as
 - b) Weber attempted an understanding of social phenomena.
 - c) Whilst Weber spoke of the rationality underlying capitalism, Marx spoke of and
 - d) For Marx, the economy was the base or which shaped the
- ii) Compare the different ways in which Marx and Weber described the emergence of capitalism. Answer in seven sentences.

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21.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have studied how Karl Marx and Max Weber studied capitalism, the economic system that came into existence in their times.

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

In the next section, we studied in more detail the points made by Max Weber regarding capitalism. We saw how rationality, which was a distinctive idea in western civilisation, marked all spheres of life. We studied rationalisation of the economy, which reflected in ‘rational capitalism’. We studied the distinction between traditional and rational capitalism. We described how Weber traced the emergence of Western capitalism by considering economic, political and cultural/religious factors. We then briefly touched upon Weber’s views on the future of western civilisation.

In the final section, we briefly compared the views of the two thinkers. We saw how their approaches to the issue, their treatment of its origins and their views of the future differed. We concluded that both regarded capitalism as an alienative system.

21.6 KEYWORDS

Book-keeping	Accounting, maintaining a record of costs and profits.
Bureaucratic rational legal state	A characteristic feature of modern societies. It is marked by codified laws and rational organisation of government.
Calling	“Following a profession or doing work as a sacred duty which god has “called” an individual to do.
Cartel	A group of industrialists who have come together to monopolise or gain complete control over the market.
Disenchantment of the world	Loss of reverence for the world. Human beings are no longer charmed or fascinated by the world. Since they can master it, they no longer find it exciting or attractive.
Ethos/Ethic	A system of beliefs, values. A world-view
Interpretative understanding	Weber’s method of “verstehen” or interpretative understanding was to study social phenomena by trying to understand them from the point of view of the participants.
Mechanical or monocausal relationship	Based on a single cause. For instance, ‘“heat makes water boil” is a monocausal explanation. Heat is the only causal factor.

Polarisation of classes

Classes seem to be at opposite ends of a scale, or polar opposites. Their interests, their ideas, their material conditions are completely opposed to each other.

Capitalism: Weber and Marx

Sacrament

Religious texts, e.g., The Bible, the Vedas etc.

Simplistic

Too easy, too obvious, neglecting deeper aspects. For instance, saying that “all drug-addicts come from broken homes” is a simplistic explanation. It neglects other factors like peer influence, poverty etc.

Stocks, shares and bonds

Companies or enterprises invite the public to participate in business by issuing shares, stocks and bonds. These are means by which individuals buy a small share of the company and thus enjoy a small share of the profits known as dividend.

This-worldly asceticism

Asceticism applied to worldly affairs or rigorous self-discipline in day-to-day life. This was the characteristic attitude of the early Protestants according to Weber. He contrasted it with other-worldly asceticism in religions like Hinduism. Here, individuals discipline themselves in order to renounce the world through penance, austerities etc.

21.7 FURTHER READING

Bottomore, Tom (Ed.). 1973. *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Blackwell: Oxford.

Collins, Randall 1986. *Max Weber - A Skeleton Key*. Sage Publications Inc.: Beverly Hills.

Freund, Julien, 1972. *The Sociology of Max Weber*. Penguin: London.

28.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i) a) F

- b) F
 - c) F
 - d) F
 - e) F
- ii) a) Marx said that the revolution of the proletariat would usher in a new social order, communism. The workers would own and control the means of production. In this way, the contradictions of the earlier stages would overcome.
- b) In the capitalist stage, commodities are exchanged for money. Money becomes the social bond in the capitalist system. Hence banks and financial institutions have an important role to play.
- c) Capitalism is a stage marked by a great deal of inequality. The capitalists own and control the means of production while the workers are forced to sell their labour power. The distance between these two classes becomes greater and greater leading to polarisation.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) By the term rationalisation, Max Weber meant the organisation of both the external world and human life itself. The external world was to be mastered and human activity was to be coordinated in such a manner as to result in greater efficiency and productivity. Nothing was left to chance or nature.
- b) Traditional capitalists treated business as a gamble. The products they sold were limited in range and often very expensive. Their clients were few. Overseas trade being very risky, business too was a very risky and uncertain affair.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) a) Rational legislation implies a legal system common to all. It means codification or writing down of rules and laws pertaining to individual rights and obligations. This makes it easier to enter into business contracts and helps in the growth of rational capitalism.
- b) The notion of predestination created a great deal of anxiety and insecurity in the minds of followers. They sought signs of their election not through prayers and rituals but through professional success. To be successful on this earth, they worked hard and reinvested their profits back into business so that they could be productively used.
- ii) a) F
- b) F
- c) F

Check Your Progress 4

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



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