

PREFACE

With its grounding in the “guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Equality, Affordability and Accountability,” the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) envisions flexible curricular structures and creative combinations for studies across disciplines. Accordingly, the UGC has revised the CBCS with a new Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP) to further empower the flexible choice based credit system with a multidisciplinary approach and multiple/ lateral entry-exit options. It is held that this entire exercise shall leverage the potential of higher education in three-fold ways – learner’s personal enlightenment; her/his constructive public engagement; productive social contribution. Cumulatively therefore, all academic endeavours taken up under the NEP 2020 framework are aimed at synergising individual attainments towards the enhancement of our national goals.

In this epochal moment of a paradigmatic transformation in the higher education scenario, the role of an Open University is crucial, not just in terms of improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) but also in upholding the qualitative parameters. It is time to acknowledge that the implementation of the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) and its syncing with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) are best optimised in the arena of Open and Distance Learning that is truly seamless in its horizons. As one of the largest Open Universities in Eastern India that has been accredited with ‘A’ grade by NAAC in 2021, has ranked second among Open Universities in the NIRF in 2024, and attained the much required UGC 12B status, Netaji Subhas Open University is committed to both quantity and quality in its mission to spread higher education. It was therefore imperative upon us to embrace NEP 2020, bring in dynamic revisions to our Undergraduate syllabi, and formulate these Self Learning Materials anew. Our new offering is synchronised with the CCFUP in integrating domain specific knowledge with multidisciplinary fields, honing of skills that are relevant to each domain, enhancement of abilities, and of course deep-diving into Indian Knowledge Systems.

Self Learning Materials (SLM’s) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. It is with a futuristic thought that we now offer our learners the choice of print or e-slm’s. From our mandate of offering quality higher education in the mother tongue, and from the logistic viewpoint of balancing scholastic needs, we strive to bring out learning materials in Bengali and English. All our faculty members are constantly engaged in this academic exercise that combines subject specific academic research with educational pedagogy. We are privileged in that the expertise of academics across institutions on a national level also comes together to augment our own faculty strength in developing these learning materials. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders whose participatory zeal in the teaching-learning process based on these study materials will enable us to only get better. On the whole it has been a very challenging task, and I congratulate everyone in the preparation of these SLM’s.

I wish the venture all success.

Professor (Dr.) Indrajit Lahiri
Vice-Chancellor

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Netaji Subhas Open University
Four Year Undergraduate Degree Programme
Under National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) Curriculum and Credit
Framework for Undergraduate Programmes
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) (Sociology) [NSO]
Course Type : Discipline Specific Core (DSC)
Course Title : Sociological Thinker - I
Course Code: 6CC-SO-03

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**Netaji Subhas
Open University**

UG : Sociology (HSO)

Course Title : Sociological Thinker - I

Course Code: 6CC-SO-03

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MODULE - I

Origin and Development of Sociology as a Distinct Discipline

Unit 1 □ Enlightenment

Structure

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1.1 Learning Objectives

- To understand the concept of Enlightenment in all its variety.
- To trace the historical roots of Enlightenment in religion and the birth of secular thought.

- To grasp the causal link between the ideas of Enlightenment and the development of sciences.
- To understand the new methods of enquiry that developed as a result of the Enlightenment.
- To learn about the new forms of political thought and activity that were being created from the Enlightenment.

1.2 Introduction

The term *Enlightenment* does not have one specific definition that can accurately define it in all its variations. In general, it is considered to cover new ideas and activities that developed in 18th century Europe which led to a complete upheaval of thought, action and social order and has had long lasting effects. There is in fact a historical root of the Enlightenment itself which is the development of scientific temper and the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. The discoveries and inventions of the scientific revolution were able to detach understanding of the natural world from theological understandings of the universe and cosmos. The success of the scientific revolution also gave a section of European society the power to question religious and theological dictates. This group of people were the *philosophes* or the philosophers or thinkers who were at the heart of the Enlightenment when it happened in mid-century France. Some of the important philosophers were Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot. All these thinkers formed an informal society in which one of the major and ambitious projects they worked on was the creation of an *Encyclopedia* which would store all scientific knowledge about the human and natural worlds that man would ever need. The hallmark of Enlightenment, according to one of its main philosophers (or *philosophes*) Immanuel Kant, is the ability to think for oneself and act on the basis of one's own judgement and intellectual capacities, i.e., reason. It was believed that such self-directed thought and action would lead to the much-desired improvement and progress in human life as well as aid the process of bringing peace to society ravaged by war. This ability to use reason for thought and action rather than traditional religious teachings that believed in the principle of singular truth was the distinctive feature of the Enlightenment. There was the growth of individual freedom of thought, speech and action based on questioning traditional dogmatic teachings with the help of new scientific reasoning. The Enlightenment, thus, had an emancipatory outlook which became the root of the ideas of justice and liberty that were at the heart of the French Revolution.

This emancipatory outlook of the Enlightenment was also responsible for severing the ties between thought and action by establishing a separate sphere of action that was based on scientific and empirical foundations of knowledge rather than on Church-based philosophies and theologies. The Church represented the old regime that was considered to be the main barrier to the progress of scientific thought and action and therefore a barrier to human progress as well. According to Kant, social sciences especially had to separate themselves from the knowledge that was propagated by the Church, the *mythos*, and base their knowledge on hard core empirical facts that were to be objective in nature. Thus, the classical Greek tradition of action based on thought gave way to separate zones for thought and action without much connection between the two. Great emphasis was laid, in fact, on the role of economic activity and the civil society and an independent government to bring about human progress and many philosophers wrote major treatises on this matter such as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Do You Know?

Immanuel Kant's signature statement *sapere aude* or "dare to know" is taken to be the statement that heralded the move towards Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment is not so much a specific historical event tied to a specific historical period but more of a process of development of a new form of society, individual psyche and spirituality, breaking away from the fold of traditional Church-based thoughts, values and actions. Some historians, however, have given a specific timeline as to when the Enlightenment happened which is approximately between 1750 and 1790. This period was characterized by immense intellectual and philosophical fertility and the dependence of human beings on this intellect and newly emerging philosophy to almost dramatically improve human life. As a result of that, this period was also characterized by immense social struggles for such improvement of human life which culminated into revolutions such as the French Revolution of 1789 that aimed to overthrow the ancient regime of the monarch, the nobles and the Church. The Enlightenment is associated most often with France but other parts of Europe too were developing new forms of thought and activity based on the principle of reason and were therefore experiencing Enlightenment. Some of the most important names of the French Enlightenment probably are Voltaire, Montesquieu, Condorcet and Diderot. Germany and Scotland were two other major zones of the development of Enlightenment thought. Scotland was to produce many important thinkers who took the project of Enlightenment ahead through their works such as Adam Smith and

David Hume. One of the most important names associated with the Enlightenment ideas, Immanuel Kant, was German. Other important German names are Christian Wolff and G.E. Lessing. Francis Bacon was one of the most important philosophes from England who is most well-known for making empirical thought an important method of doing science. Cesare Beccaria was an important Italian philosopher whose work on crime and punishment, *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), was highly acclaimed. There are numerous more names that may be mentioned here but these were some of the most important.

No matter where in Europe it took place, the underlying temperament of every movement towards Enlightenment was the diminishing importance of religious teachings and the development of secularism to explain the natural world as well as human thought and action, i.e., the social world. The ultimate agenda of these philosophes was aiding the process of human progress. New ideas and knowledge were widely circulated among scientists and philosophers through scientific academies, literary salons, coffeehouses as well as through books, pamphlets and journals. However, that the Enlightenment philosophers were a rather closed circle of people since most of the common citizens of Europe were not equipped enough to understand the newly forming scientific, secular, political views that were rather abstract in nature and were still steeped in the theological and religious philosophies. The intellectuals of the 18th century, therefore, formed an elite and closed-off group that was largely creating and sharing ideas that were effectively severing ties between religion and reason and were creating a secular sphere of thought and action. There were other reasons too why the ideas of the Enlightenment did not reach every section of European society such as availability and costs of books and pamphlets or scientific and technological devices used in research and experimentation. In the next few sections, we will study the historical roots of the Enlightenment in greater detail, concentrating upon the distinction that was created between religion and secularism with emphasis on the role of science in the rise of secularism and the agenda for human progress, the new methods of enquiry that were created not just in the natural sciences but even influenced the study of the social world and therefore the social sciences.

1.3 Separation of Science and Religion

The Enlightenment was a result of the scientific revolution that took place in the 16th century. It created the discipline of science and a scientific temperament in Europe that showed new ways of looking at the world through an “objective” lens that would

help establish a new form of *truth* that was often in direct opposition to the traditional myths or *mythos* that were propagated as truth by the Church. This traditional, dogmatic truth about a particular world order was challenged as a result of new discoveries of science that were based on empirical observations of reality, the creation and use of new forms of technology, an experimental and logical bent of mind and the use of mathematical theory to arrive at the objective reality that was distinct from religious myths and traditional explanations of the cosmos. Let us study about the challenge posed to religion as a result of the birth of science in greater detail.

1.3.1 Differentiation into Religious and Secular Realms

The distinction between theological understanding and objective understanding had been there for a long time well before the development of science and had aided the understanding of the physical and social worlds. The distinction was seen in two forms of reasoning. One form of reasoning was *mythos* which pertained to the traditional form of reasoning based on religion and the idea of sacred. The reasoning based on *mythos* what later on was rebranded as “religion”. The other form of reasoning that was the basis of objective enquiry was *logos* which meant logical and critical reasoning that aimed to find objective truths based on analytical empiricism. This form of reasoning became “secularism”. Secularism pertained to anything that was not related to the supernatural powers and religious rituals and behaviours. The European scientists and philosophers in the 18th century began to create a new version of reality that was distinct from the reality propagated by the Church and the Bible. In the 19th century, several important scientific, political and philosophical developments took place that struck major blows to religion such as criticisms of the Bible coming in from various philosophers and Darwin’s *On the Origins of Species* published in 1859 that showed how evolution was a process of natural selection rather than of divine powers. It is argued by many, thus, that the distinction between and separation of religion from other aspects of society and culture is a modern Western creation. However, it must be mentioned here that this distinction was not broadly accepted in the Western society until about the 20th century when the Western population saw greater diversity of ethnicities and therefore religions and cultures and took a secular stance officially to deal with such diversities. Therefore, secularism was as much the result of political conditions as of the developments in science and technology in the Western world.

Religion began to be dissected with the principles of science and many important works from noted philosophers are still studied to this day. Scientific discoveries by Kepler and Galileo led to what is often termed as the “Copernican revolution” that comprised of experimental science that discovered the real nature of the world and the

universe through empirical observation and that led to the creation of new logical and empirically derived truths about the world. The social world was also being studied anew as a result of this new scientific and logical bent of mind which tried to disentangle the views of the social and physical world from myths and dogmatic religious beliefs. Around 19th century, the disciplines of Comparative Religion and Religious Studies was born that aimed at the scientific study of religion, widening the gap and intensifying the conflict between science and religion. Max Mueller was an important name in this regard and in *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (1873) he argued that divinity and morality are born from human faith. He was also influenced by the Protestant version of Christianity and used Comparative Religion to spread the word of Protestantism that was starkly different from Catholic Christianity. However, at this time, most philosophers were trying to only re-conceptualize traditional theological knowledge to fit the new objective and secular world that was being created. There were also some philosophers who were emphasizing on the religious/secular divide such as Eliade's book *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957) and Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Other important philosophers who were also emphasizing this divide were Weber and Evans Pritchard. However, the proper scientific study of religion that emphasizes the difference between the religious or sacred and the profane or secular began in a proper way only in the 20th century. The secular sensibilities behind religious beliefs were revealed through these scientific studies of religion. The religious prophets were dehumanized and demystified and thus almost made profane themselves.

An important effect of this separation of religion from a newly formed secular realm was extreme censorship. Anything that was said against religious teachings or the Bible or against the authorities of the old regime was censored because they were a direct assault to the long-held power of the Church and the old regime. In such an environment, scientific thought and reason were kept alive through disguise. It became commonplace to discuss anti-establishment thoughts and ideas by talking about other subjects openly that had underlying meanings only some could understand, thereby staying out of reach of the authorities and possible penalties. Another method of dealing with censorship was never to mention names of contemporary Enlightenment philosophers in order to keep them safe.

This distinction between the religious and the secular created as a result of scientific discoveries and the triumph of reason over myths led to the clarification of human conceptions related to the world and society and using knowledge about the real world to act freely and thus live more meaningfully by not being at the mercy of myths

anymore. In this separation of religion from the secular world, the Newtonian and Darwinian scientific discoveries and knowledge had an important role to play, which will be discussed below but before that let us briefly look into the forms of religion most commonly associated with the Enlightenment.

1.3.2 Deism and Atheism

Deism does not believe in one supreme and miraculous God like Jesus whose teachings are compiled in the Bible. Instead, deists believe in natural reason as the source of understanding that the whole universe is guided by a greater form of intelligence. To the deist, both, Jesus Christ and the Bible, are open to rationalistic questioning and are thus made more mortal and mundane than sacred and miraculous. Every miracle has an explanation that can be sought through rational methods, according to deists. Thus, religion, although acknowledged by the Enlightenment thinkers, could also be comprehended through the methods of natural science. Newton, for example, in his *Opticks* (1704) said that the order and the beauty that we see around us in the natural world must mean that there is a supreme intelligence that has worked to create this beautiful order in nature. It was England where the deist philosophy first began and Locke's *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) tried to show that Christianity was a religion which was compatible with rational, reasonable thinking. Though neither Newton nor Locke were deists themselves, they influenced a group of deists later on such as John Toland, Anthony Collins and others. Their influence also spread to France from England when Voltaire carried the deist ideas over to France.

Atheism became most popular in France during the French Revolution. Diderot and d'Holbach were some of the main proponents of this form of thought. Atheism said explanations for the order of nature can be found only in the laws of nature rather than in a supernatural power. Baron d'Holbach, being influenced by Diderot, wrote *System of Nature* (1770) which was one of the main books written on atheism. He propagated ethical naturalism which is an ethics that is based on laws of nature rather than on supernatural explanations. d'Holbach passionately criticised the existing forms of religion, politics and society by using a materialistic and deterministic conception of nature according to which there can be no religion that can prescribe morals, ethics and values which can be best determined through the laws of the nature.

1.3.3 The Impact of Newton and Darwin

Bacon's inductive logic of research with Descartes' reductionism and other scientific methods were brought together by Isaac Newton when he created a form of

experimental science based on logical reasoning. With Newton's science reaching other parts of Europe, greater and greater interest was generated among scientists and philosophers to study the physical and social worlds with this new form of scientific reasoning. This period of European history was called the "age of Enlightenment" by various philosophers of that time because of the impact of Newtonian science that was gradually making people aware about new aspects of the world they knew for so long through religious *mythos*. These philosophers began to collect empirical data about the natural and social worlds and use Newtonian laws to validate and explain the data. This effort culminated in the project of the *Encyclopedie* or the Encyclopedia that was created in the 18th century to store all empirically and scientifically validated knowledge about the natural and human worlds. The philosophers of Europe believed for as long as one whole millennium that one single book could contain all knowledge and information that man could possibly need to gain a rational and objective understanding of reality. However, what the Encyclopedia did was to simply replace one source of knowledge labelled as valid for so long – the Bible – to another source which was itself. It did not challenge the idea that there is one single law that governs the world. The only difference was that the law was taken away from the religious sphere and put in the sphere of the secular. The law of religion was invalidated and the law of nature was validated in its place.

The Encyclopedia was subtitled "*systematic dictionary of the sciences, arts and crafts*" and was edited by the famous philosophers Diderot and d'Alembert. It was published over 21 years between 1751 and 1772 and comprised of 28 volumes that contained more than 70,000 articles that were contributed by 140 writers including the great thinkers of the French Enlightenment. It covered topics that were abstract and theoretical through to the most practical and mechanical. The aim of the Encyclopedia was to detach knowledge about the world and society from the religious and authoritarian forces of the old regime and thus was a seminal example of secular, anti-authoritarian work. Being so, it was promptly censored by the authorities and it was the persistent efforts of Diderot that helped in the completion of the project. The Encyclopedia was an excellent example of social knowledge since it was created through a collaborative and thus social effort and it also aimed at explaining and improving human society.

Apart from Newton, another scientist whose work created waves of change in thought and ideas in Europe in the 19th century was Charles Darwin. His theory of evolution through natural selection gave a major blow to the idea of the uniqueness of human beings and made human survival open to and dependent on selection through forces

of nature and the physical world. Knowledge about human beings was, thus, accessible through the study of nature rather than through supernatural philosophies of the divine that put all source of knowledge squarely at the hands of religion. Darwin's scientific theories are considered to be the most important impetus to the cause of the Enlightenment since they were probably the most instrumental in secularizing all known life in the world. His theory of natural selection showed that it was genetic modification rather than divine powers of a supreme God that was at the root of the growth and evolution of new organisms, including the evolution of the human species. These genetic modifications were nature's answer to the struggle for survival in changing environments and some of these modifications were selected by nature which would thus be able to survive through better adaptation. People began to rethink about the nature of human beings and the nature of human society and institutions, seeing them as dynamic and continuously evolving things rather than as static and unchanging and at the mercy of the divine. This theory of continuously evolving and interdependent life forms led to paradigm shift in the understanding of the social world later on.

Thus, as a result of the scientific discoveries and their gradual spread into different sections of society, the Church and the nobility began to lose their authoritative position in this new form of society where reason and empirical objectivism began to play more important roles than religion and metaphysics or theology to understand human existence. New methods of enquiry were born.

1.4 Check your Progress

1.4.1 Answer in Detail

1. Give a general overview of the term Enlightenment.
2. What is the historical background to the Enlightenment?
3. How did Newton and Darwin aid the process of separation of religious and secular realms of thought and action?
4. Differentiate between Enlightenment religions and the religious ideals before the Enlightenment.

1.4.2 Answer Briefly

1. What was the role of Charles Darwin in the propagation of Enlightenment?
2. What was the Encyclopedia?

3. Who were the *philosophes* and what was their role in the Enlightenment?
4. How does deism differ from atheism?

1.5 New Methods of Enquiry

As a result of the scientific discoveries that were going on from the 16th century onwards that were leading to greater knowledge about the natural world, methods of enquiry about the social world were also changing. Increased knowledge about the world made humans think that they could overcome limitations placed on them by nature by the use of methods like rationality, empiricism and scepticism. In the following pages, we will gain a brief understanding of these new methods of enquiry that were being used by the philosophers and scientists right from 17th century onwards.

1.5.1 Rationalism

Rationalism is simply the use of reason to undertake thought and action. Reason is considered something that is completely separate from the realm of the divine or the emotional. One of the main proponents of this method was Rene Descartes whose method is called the *method of doubt* which in actuality is somewhat different from what rationality is usually taken to mean, i.e., the separation of reason and emotion. Descartes' believed that scientific rationality was to doubt whatever propositions of research could be doubted. Thus, the aim was to doubt all knowledge about the external world and was to be rigorously questioned until proven true. Since the external world could be known only through our senses, therefore even our senses were to be doubted. The idea of God, however, is known better by human beings because it is understood through one's mind rather perceived externally with the help of senses. Such a system of thought brought about a separation of the mind and the body. To him, thus, all valid knowledge came from God. Scientific knowledge, then, is not possible or achievable without knowledge of metaphysics and the divine. This method of investigation used by Descartes expresses one of the central epistemological questions related to human society and knowledge, i.e., how to gain objectivity in empirical knowledge. Even though his idea of valid knowledge was firmly rooted in metaphysics, he tried to rationalize such metaphysical knowledge by creating mathematical formulae that would aid in the process of knowing the physical world and thereby help in the progress of the natural sciences. In fact, Newton himself was influenced by Descartes' rational understanding of science and knowledge.

This form of thinking about science and knowledge, however, was conservative and did not pose any serious threats to the old regime since it merely tried to accommodate the new ideas as methods into the old ones dictated by metaphysics and religion.

In opposition to this conservative and softer form of scientific enquiry that the method of doubt was, Spinoza put forth a more radical rationalist view of science and society. He challenged Descartes' distinction between mind and body and instead emphasized on the unity of both. Spinoza's more radical branch of Enlightenment led to the birth of ideas like democracy, individual liberty and the eradication of the authority of the Church. Morality was thus separated from metaphysical and theological ideas unlike in the rationalism of Descartes.

Overall, the rationalist mode of enquiry led to the development of other important methods of enquiry that were to play an important role in the Enlightenment project.

1.5.2 Empiricism

Empirical study of science as well as the empirical theory of knowledge about the world was one of the key features of the rationalistic age of Enlightenment. It was to be a method of enquiry that was in direct contrast with what might be considered the age of so-called darkness where all knowledge was based on religious faith and religious dictates. The empirical method was founded by Francis Bacon who began to use experimental science to understand the natural world. Bacon is often called the father of experimental philosophy. His method of scientific analysis involved the empirical observation of reality often through experimentation and the use of inductive logic in analysis which would ultimately help in the generation of new knowledge that can be used for practical, rational purposes. The inductive logic is, unlike the rationalists' deductive logic, based on a bottom-up method of using specific empirical observations to formulate new theories that would be steeped in the empirical data. The rationalist philosophers of the Enlightenment used deductive logic of science and theorization of knowledge whereby they began with a priori knowledge about the universe and nature and explained their current state of society based on such principles and theories. Empiricism, thus, influenced the move towards the use of inductive logic of theory building based on observable data during the 18th century. With the evolution of empirical science based on inductive logic, the modern science of 18th century began to distance itself from metaphysics unlike the science of the 16th and 17th century, of the age of rationality and reason, which, although separated from theology and religion, was still largely connected to metaphysical views about the world and human society.

This is evident in Descartes' philosophy of science which tried to rationalize metaphysical knowledge.

Apart from Bacon, John Locke's work *Essay Concerning Human Nature* (1690) was another important text that was anti-metaphysical and thereby tried to create a new epistemology during the age of Enlightenment. In this work, Locke said that it is only with our senses that we gain any idea about what exists around us, thereby rejecting the metaphysical logic that we can know some things innately alone. Such an epistemological position, however, brought with it the problem of objectivity – how do we know that the idea that we gain of an object through our senses or even innately is a true representation of that object only and nothing else?

1.5.3 Skepticism

This school of thought and enquiry is based on the questioning of the certainty of knowledge about anything. More than a method of enquiry, skepticism was a mode of thought that became the most prominent and used in the time of the Enlightenment but had its roots in previous centuries. This mode of thought led philosophers and scientists to debunk and question any knowledge, whether religious or metaphysical or even scientific. Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) and Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) are two works that were created with the tool of skepticism. Bayle's work especially portrays the sceptical spirit that was to be the hallmark of the Enlightenment and the age of reason by questioning all dogmatic knowledge, religious or scientific. However, it was David Hume who paved the way for skepticism during the Enlightenment by searching for the limits to human reasoning and thought. His works *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) are important readers in the school of skepticism. The skeptical bent of mind that was the at the root of all science and rationality during this time was, however, symptomatic of a larger tension that was brewing within European intellectual circles at this time – a crisis of authoritative knowledge in any field since all knowledge was being questioned. Since all knowledge was questionable, therefore there was no one source of knowledge that could be treated as valid and authoritative.

All of these methods of enquiry had a decisive impact on the growth of social sciences, including sociology. The continuously emerging objective knowledge about the natural world through new methods of enquiry based on rationality, experimentation and inductive methods of knowledge production had its impact on the philosophers of the social world and there emerged an intense desire to study man and his world with the help of natural laws of physics and biology. Herbert Spencer and August

Comte's sociological theorizing are some of the best examples of such an effort on the part of the social philosophers.

1.6 New Politics

One of the biggest impacts of the Enlightenment was perhaps to be seen in the new forms of politics that emerged as a result of the changes in thought. The biggest boost to the formation of new forms of government was the separation of religion from the state and the ability of science to gradually take its place as the source of all valid knowledge. Individual freedom became the clarion call of the Enlightenment and based on this idea and others, new forms of political activities and structures began to be created in European society. An era of modern politics dawned on Western society as a result of the Enlightenment based on values of democracy and liberty. The new forms of politics were a result of the important revolutions that were happening during this time such as the French Revolution (1789-1799), the American Revolution (1775-1783) and the English Revolution (1688).

One of the most important intellectual sources for new forms of politics was the social contract theory which was inspired by Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes was one of the most important people who developed liberalism that is so intricately connected with European Enlightenment. Ideas like the equality of all men and women, basic rights of the individual, the importance of consent in the exercise of power by the ruler, etc., were propagated by Hobbes. The social contract theory was written upon mostly by Locke and Rousseau. It propagated that the authority of the state or the ruler over the individuals is legitimated by the individuals because they have given up a portion of their freedom to the ruler in exchange for the protection of their rights and interests by the ruler. Thus, a contract is created between the two parties, viz. the state and the individual, in which the individual is under the rule of the state and it is *rationally consented* to by the individual. Thus, political power or authority cannot be not divinely granted to anyone, it cannot be gained through conquest or through any myths and traditions. Political power must be rationally established through general agreement among the governor and the governed. For Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, this form of contract in which the individual agrees to be under the rule of the state is necessary for the maintenance of a civil society, which was one of the most important developments of the Enlightenment. The main point of argument and differentiation was the difference between the man who is all-powerful, especially because of the growth of private property, who is under no authority that may control him and the

man who is tied by the needs of the society and reigns in his power for the greater good and maintenance of a just and equal society. To Rousseau, such a man is the “natural” man who, in his opinion, is better than the “civil” man who is corrupted by the power of private property. Thus, ideas of justice were integral to such a society and form of politics. Politics was, thus, secularized and power taken away from wealthy of the old regime who owned private property and ruled over the general masses with the help of the power of the Church. It was also rationalized because religion did not have any place in politics anymore.

1.6.1 Civil Society

In a nutshell, the civil society simply comprises of the people who amass private property through work and mercantilism. As such, the civil society grew as a result of increasing trade and the rise of the mercantile class. John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) was dedicated to the political philosophy that would aid this class of merchant capitalists who largely formed the civil society by giving great importance to the need to protect and preserve private property. Economic freedom was an integral aspect of individual freedom according to the Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith who describes the importance of free trade and restricted government regulation in the activities of the market in the establishment of a civil society. Unrestricted trade would bring people of different languages, cultures, religions and races together and they would be connected through the motions of the economy and trade. Thus, a peaceful and universalistic world order based on ideas of rationality and development would be created through the economic freedom that would be characteristic of the civil society. However, this economic freedom of the individual who tried to gather private property is, although symptomatic of liberalism, directly in contrast to the ideal of democracy which was best exemplified by Rousseau in his *On the Social Contract* (1762) which was in opposition to the Lockean form of economic and political liberalism of the civil society. According to Rousseau, it is only the democratic form of government that would be able to truly bring about and maintain individual freedom. It is important for all individuals to be in general agreement about their politics through equal participation.

For Rousseau, the civil society must comprise of people who are actively and continuously involved in political affairs so that the individual will is identified with the general will. This was in contrast with Locke’s view of the individual with politics in that, for him, individual will has the power to limit the authority of the government. Thus, it would seem that for Locke the individual is above the government but he/she comes into contract with the government in order to maintain the civil society and

for Rousseau, it the government that has been granted the most power by the individual for the maintenance of the civil society.

Another important figure in the realm of new political thoughts and ideas during the Enlightenment was Montesquieu whose *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) was one of the foundational books of modern political theory. He showed in this book how legislation is affected not by religion but by other objective geographical and demographic features such as climate, soil fertility, population size, etc. He distinguished between different forms of government, viz., republics (including democracies as well as aristocracies), monarchies and despotisms. He argued that for the proper functioning of the democratic political organization, it is imperative that individuals value the well-being of the general public than their own self-interests, i.e., democracies can function properly only when people possess civic virtues. Thus, the civil society and civic virtues of man became essential for the newly emerging political body as a result of the Enlightenment.

1.7 Check your Progress

1.7.1 Answer in Detail

1. What were the changes in politics as a result of the Enlightenment ideas?
2. Discuss the new methods of enquiry that were evolved during the Enlightenment as a result of the previous revolution in science?

1.7.2 Answer Briefly

1. Differentiate between rationalism and empiricism.
2. Discuss the role of civil society in the development of new forms of politics during the Enlightenment.

1.8 Conclusion

The most important characteristic of the Enlightenment probably was the split between religion and other spheres of life and society which were then named secular. This split, although slow to come about and even slower to engulf the entire Western society fully, originated from and intensified the realm of scientific reason, objectivist empiricism and a skeptical attitude towards anything that was metaphysical or theological. As a result of this separation of the natural world from the world of god and the discoveries that showed that man was a creation of nature and followed the

laws of nature in evolution rather than divine interjections, the ideas of the individuality of man, his rights, his liberty, all became important in understanding man and human society. The new ideas of the Enlightenment helped the then European society deal with inequalities and perversions of wealth and power concentrated in the hands of the few. The Enlightenment culminated in various revolutions in Europe and beyond, the most important ones being the French Revolution and the American Revolution.

1.9 Summary

This unit offers a comprehensive exploration of the evolving relationship between science, religion, and politics, focusing on the intellectual transformations that shaped modern thought. It begins by identifying key learning objectives to help students understand these paradigmatic shifts, followed by an introduction to the interplay between religious belief and scientific inquiry. The section on the separation of science and religion demonstrates the gradual differentiation of religious and secular realms, a process influenced by the rise of deism and atheism, and further propelled by the revolutionary contributions of Newton and Darwin, whose work challenged traditional religious explanations of the natural world.

Moving forward, the unit delves into the emergence of new methods of enquiry, presenting rationalism, empiricism, and skepticism as key intellectual tools that redefined the ways individuals understood the universe. These epistemological shifts not only fuelled scientific progress but also impacted societal structures, particularly in the realm of politics. The discussion on new politics and civil society examines how these intellectual movements contributed to the formation of modern democratic ideals and the public sphere, allowing for more participatory forms of governance.

The “Check Your Progress” sections encourage critical thinking by asking students to engage with the material both in depth and briefly, reinforcing the core themes of the unit. In the final section, the unit ties together these complex intellectual and political developments, offering a summation that emphasizes the transformative power of reason, inquiry, and civic engagement in shaping modern societies. The suggested readings provide additional resources for those seeking a deeper understanding of these critical historical shifts.

By the end, learners are equipped with a nuanced understanding of how science, religion, and politics have influenced one another throughout history, contributing to the broader intellectual and social frameworks that continue to shape our world today.

1.10 Questions

Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the factors that contributed to the separation of science and religion, focusing on the differentiation into religious and secular realms.
2. Explain the rise of deism and atheism as intellectual movements and how they challenged traditional religious beliefs.
3. Analyze the impact of Newton and Darwin's contributions to scientific thought and their role in reshaping religious explanations of the natural world.
4. Compare and contrast the three new methods of enquiry: rationalism, empiricism, and skepticism. How did these methods influence the intellectual landscape?
5. Describe the evolution of civil society and its role in the development of modern democratic ideals. How did intellectual movements shape this political transformation?
6. Summarize the key shifts in thought that led to the separation of science and religion. How did these shifts influence both the scientific and political realms?
7. Discuss how the rise of new methods of enquiry influenced the development of modern political ideas, especially in relation to civil society.

Short Answer Questions

1. What is deism, and how does it differ from atheism?
2. How did Newton's contributions challenge religious explanations of the natural world?
3. What are the key differences between rationalism and empiricism?
4. Define skepticism and its role in modern intellectual thought.
5. What is civil society, and how did it contribute to the emergence of democratic ideals?
6. How did Darwin's theory of evolution impact religious beliefs?
7. Why is the separation of religious and secular realms significant in understanding modern history?
8. Briefly explain the role of civil society in modern political developments.
9. What is the significance of suggested readings in deepening your understanding of intellectual history?

1.11 References

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Unit 2 □ French and American Revolutions

Structure

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2.3 American Revolution

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2.3.2 Impact of Enlightenment on American Revolution

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2.5 French Revolution

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2.6 Check Your Progress

2.6.1 Answer in Detail

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2.1 Learning Objectives

- To learn about the causes of both Revolutions
- To trace the influence of the Enlightenment on the Revolutions
- To know about the major events associated with each Revolution
- To learn about the range of effects that both Revolutions had on American and French society, culture and politics

- To look for differences and similarities in both Revolutions

2.2 Introduction

Modern politics is largely a result of the American and French Revolutions that happened in the 18th century. The American Revolution is considered to have taken place during 1765 and 1783 which resulted in the American War of Independence in 1775 and the French Revolution began in 1789 in the aftermath of the French Enlightenment and ended towards the end of the 18th century when Napoleon Bonaparte came to power. The French Revolution was largely influenced by the American Revolution. The American Revolution, in its turn, was influenced by the ideas of the French Enlightenment as well as by the enlightenment ideas of other parts of Europe. Both Revolutions brought about significant changes to the social and, especially, political structures of their societies with, one of the main changes being the birth of the concept of human rights.

In the following pages, we will first understand the causes and consequences of each of the two revolutions and end with drawing out the commonalities and differences between them.

2.3. The American Revolution

The American Revolution was a civil war as well as an international level military war between the American colonists and the British loyalists with the aid of the French. The American Revolution resulted in the American War of Independence which was a war waged by thirteen British colonies in North America which were dissatisfied with the policies of Great Britain. One of the main sources of influence and inspiration for the leaders of the American Revolution came from the Enlightenment ideas like freedom of speech, freedom of the press, religious tolerance, equality, etc. The American War of Independence, fought between 1775 and 1783 with the help of France, led to the creation of the independent nation called the United States of America. Let us understand in brief the major causes and effects of the Revolution.

2.3.1 The Causes of American Revolution

The British crown had implemented new taxes on the people of America when the French and Indian War, often referred to as the Seven Years' War that waged between 1756 and 1763, led to great expenses incurred by the colonialists. In order to make

up for the expenses of the war by increasing revenue, the British crown started to exorbitantly tax its colonies in North America. Some of these tax policies included the Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Acts of 1767 and the Tea Act of 1773. Through these resistances and protests, the American colonial subjects wanted to assert the same rights including Parliamentary representation as the British subjects in the colonies had. These resistances even led to killing of some Americans in the Boston Massacre in 1770 when the British opened fire on the Americans.

1. *The Stamp Act* – The Stamp Act made it mandatory for legal documents or any printed documents to be stamped and the colonized would have to pay a tax against that stamp whenever they handled such documents. There were massive protests against this act and the colonized argued that the British crown could not tax them without allowing their own people to be represented in the legislature. They rejected the British crown's policy of "taxation without representation" as it was called and carried on widespread protests, often violent, until the act was repealed by the British in 1766.
2. *The Townshend Acts* – The Townshend Acts were passed to tax imported goods like paper, paint, glass, etc. that came from Britain to the British colonies in America. One of the main reasons behind the imposition of this tax was to generate salaries of the governors of the colonies. Other colonists had usually accepted such taxation but the taxation imposed by the Townshend Acts came at a time when the Americans were already dissatisfied with the Stamps Act. The American colonists thus vehemently opposed such taxation imposed on them. They boycotted the taxed products. Ultimately, all imported products were made tax-free in 1770 except for tea which led to the Boston Tea Party a few years later.
3. *The Tea Act* – The Tea Act was passed in an effort to help the East India Company that was in bad form. The Act allowed the Company monopoly over the tea market and its import and sales in America. The American colonists resisted and protested against these and other such acts. The resistance to the Tea Act led to the well-known event in American history – the Boston Tea Party – on 16th December, 1773, in which protestors of the Sons of Liberty boarded East India Company ships and dropped the tea loaded on the ships into the sea. This was met by a series of Coercive Acts passed in 1774. The aim was to punish the people of Boston and Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party and other such acts of destruction of anything British or for flouting the British laws.

Things to Do

Find out why the Townshend Acts were named such.

Twelve out of the thirteen colonies of the British crown formed the Continental Congress to further the American colonists' demands. In April 1775, the British troops marched to Concord near Boston in the night to attack the American colonial military. This led to a clash between the British and the American militia in Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. This clash signalled the beginning of the American War of Independence under the leadership of George Washington and on 4th July 1776, the United States Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Second Continental Congress. The Declaration pronounced the exact causes regarding the resistance of Americans of the British royal powers. France and Spain joined the Americans in their battle against the British 1778 onwards and cleared large parts of the North American territory of British occupancy. The British, represented by Lord Cornwallis, surrendered to the joint offensive of France and America in October 1781 and in 1782 the British Parliament voted to stop offensives in America. On 3rd September 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed by the two parties that recognized the sovereignty and independence of the United States of America, thus, formally ending the war. None of this would probably have been possible, however, had it not been for the influence that the Enlightenment ideas had over the American leaders.

Do You Know

Even to this day, every year in Boston, the Boston Tea Party of 1773 is re-enacted to celebrate the anniversary of the event. Replicas of the three East India Company ships are also kept which visitors can tour.

2.3.2 Impact of Enlightenment on American Revolution

The above were only some of the main causes behind the outbreak of the American War of Independence but there were other underlying factors that were brewing the Revolution from well before the War broke out. These factors were the ideas of the Enlightenment as expounded by some of the most common philosophers associated with the Enlightenment such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Baron de Montesquieu, John Locke and others. In the Declaration of Independence that was written by the leaders of the Continental Congress, Thomas Jefferson, the author of the document, wrote that every American had rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". These ideas were taken directly out of the Enlightenment. The social contract theory that stated that people had the right to overthrow a government that was not looking after

its citizens as per the agreement that the people and the government went into was widely celebrated by the leaders of the American Revolution. Religious and political freedom in the colonies were the main ideas of the European Enlightenment that affected the Americans. The new nation that was formed as a result of the War of Independence was created with the help of the ideas of the Enlightenment. Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws that talked about the separation of powers of the government became an influential force when the independent nation of the United States of America was formed. The social contract theory, the natural rights of humans to own property, the need for human beings to obey a higher authority rather than the laws of the nature for successful social life, all became important influences in America's struggle for freedom and its endeavour to create a just, independent state thereafter that was to be built upon ideas like religious freedom and tolerance, rationalism, etc. that were taken right out of the European, especially French Enlightenment.

Just as the French revolutionaries of the Enlightenment period had helped the Americans in their freedom struggle and the Americans were ideologically influenced by the French, the French Revolution too was inspired by the American Revolution and the American War fought for their independence. The Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the American Constitution inspired the French revolutionaries by making human rights, human liberty and democratic governance a possibility.

Things to Do

Find out how the above-mentioned European Enlightenment thinkers influenced the American Revolution in different aspects.

2.3.3 Some Effects of American Revolution

The American Revolution had some far-reaching effects for the nation as well as worldwide. Let us go through them briefly:

1. *Abolition of Slavery* – The initial steps towards the abolition of slavery were taken by the leaders of the American Revolution. The spirit of emancipation that the American Revolution had created was a major impetus towards the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of slaves. Slavery was first abolished in Vermont in 1777 and by 1804, slavery was more or less completely removed from the land of the United States of America. Even the British abolished slavery in most of its colonies through a Parliamentary Act in 1833.
2. *The Separation of the Church and the State* – The American states, as a result of the Revolution, disestablished their Church and made the Church a realm

that was separate from the state. This was in stark contrast to the British colonizers who used the taxes collected from the colonists to support the Church. This disestablishment of the Church was a major step towards the creation of a secular state.

3. *Setting up New Forms of Government* – The American Revolution led to the setting up of republican governments by adopting written constitutions. This led to a major change in the laws and penal codes of the different states. Capital punishment and violent physical punishments were legally made non-existent even though Britain still continued to follow capital punishment in its motherland as well as colonies.
4. *Removal of Aristocratic and Feudal Systems* – The Revolution was instrumental in legally removing the remnants of exploitative and discriminatory feudal and aristocratic social structures. All the British era laws and taxes that were in place to protect the feudal and aristocratic structures were legally terminated. This ensured that the hereditary, patriarchal privileges of owning titles and/or land were eliminated, thereby paving way for a more just society based on equality and liberty.
5. *The Spread of Revolutionary Ideas* – The Revolution's biggest effect at the international level was the spread of the revolutionary ideas that it represented such as human rights, liberal democracy. It inspired the growth of revolutions in other parts of the world, mainly in Europe, against the ancient regime of the Church and the feudal, monarchical governance. The Revolution also led the British colonizers to make attempts to better accommodate the demands of the colonies and grant them a certain degree of autonomous governance in various parts of the world even though it was a bid to prevent the birth of more such revolutions as this one in other colonies.

2.4 Check your Progress

2.4.1 Answer in Detail

1. Based on your understanding of the Enlightenment ideas, explain how American colonists were influenced by it in their struggle against the British colonizers.
2. Explain the various causes behind the American Revolution and the American War of Independence.
3. What were the major effects of the American Revolution?

2.4.2 Answer Briefly

1. Describe in brief the importance of the Boston Tea Party.
2. Who were some of the most influential European Enlightenment thinkers for the leaders of the American Revolution? How did they influence the Revolution?
3. What were the Townshend Acts?
4. What were some of the impacts of the American Revolution in other parts of the world, especially in other British colonies?

2.5 The French Revolution

The French Revolution resulted largely from the widespread discontent among the people of France with their existing socio-political structure. It was a revolution fuelled by the “men of letters” or the newly emerging rational intellectuals. It often resulted in bloodbaths and terrorization of the people and did not end in a complete success. In spite of that, it did bring about a new era of politics by asserting the strength and the importance of the will of the people. Its impact was also far reaching in space as well as in time. In the following pages, we will learn about the causes and the effects of the French Revolution.

2.5.1 The Causes of French Revolution

There are disagreements over scholars and historians as to what the specific causes of the French Revolution were but the following may be seen as some of them:

1. *Dissatisfaction with the Monarchical System* – The kingdom of France under kings Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI was a rich, powerful one with no real obstacles for the monarch to do as he pleased. The kings also wielded power over the people by saying that their rights were granted to them by divine powers. The kings, especially Louis XVI, lived an opulent life at the cost of the poor peasantry and commoners. The commoners were made into miserable and poor vassals of feudal lords who often were members of the clergy. The absolute monarchical rule that controlled all aspects of French life and society such as political power, the economy and all forms of authority, had become unbearable for the people of France.
2. *Dissatisfaction with the Clergy* – The clergy was the other most powerful section of the then French society which formed the first of the three estates into which French society was stratified. It possessed numerous privileges such

as not having to pay taxes, having its own court of law, having its own internal administration, etc. It even held huge amounts of land in different parts of France. Those who were associated with the church in any power such as the bishops also acted as feudal lords over various villages throughout France. The clergy allied with the monarchy by giving it its symbolic power through the religious rite of coronation of the new king that was supposed to legitimize the authority of the king over his subjects. The church even possessed monopoly control over education in the nation thus controlling thought of the people as well as the power to censor anything it deemed unsuitable. All these rules and privileges made it easy for the church to control the people of France for its own vested interests as well as of the monarchy and aristocracy. It is obvious that such powers of the church over the common people frustrated the commoners and was one of the root causes of the Revolution.

3. *Dissatisfaction with the Nobility* – The nobility formed the second of the three estates. It too was very powerful just like the first estate. It too owned huge swathes of land in France that amounted to almost twenty per cent of the total available land in France. The nobility was exempted from paying many taxes and instead had to collect taxes from the peasants. They also had to give military assistance to the king whenever required. Because they owned land, the nobles had certain rights that came along with the land and were also to collect dues in the form of taxes from the peasants. They could also ask for a portion of the vassals' harvest as part of their revenue. They even had judicial rights over the vassals. Thus, the sweeping rights of feudal lords over their vassals was another reason for the growth of resentment and revolting attitude among the people of France.
4. *Economic Crisis* – The French economy was in a state of ruins by the end of the 18th century owing to the extravagance of the King Louis XVI as well as the king before him. For instance, the remodelling of the Palace of Versailles became immensely costly to the nation and it was the third estate comprising of the general population of peasants, merchants, bourgeois, etc. who had to pay for it. The involvement of France in the American Revolution also put pressure on its coffers. Poor harvests due to bad weather conditions had added to the misery of the common people, especially the poor. On top of the lack of food, the common citizens had to pay heavy taxes to the empire through the nobility which directly filled their coffers. Thus, the general people were burdened by the economic crisis brought about by the rulers of

the nation as well as by natural causes which again led to widespread discontent.

All these factors led to widespread discontent among the people, especially the poor, and they often resorted to strikes, riots and loots to express their dissatisfaction and frustration with the regime, thereby leading to the French Revolution. One of the major events of the Revolution was the storming of the Bastille in which the third estate of Paris rushed to the fort to gather arms and ammunition from there to use against the king's army in their battle for freedom from the monarchy. King Louis XVI, his wife Marie Antoinette and their children were imprisoned by the radical revolutionaries of the National Convention. When they tried to flee, they were caught and it was decided by the National Convention that the king would be executed on charges of treason for trying to flee his country. He was guillotined on 21st January 1793 (his wife was executed too after a few years). A revolutionary government was also formed in the city of Paris. In all this revolutionary action, many nobles left France for safer places in other parts of Europe and America. With the beheading of Louis XVI, a Reign of Terror had begun in France, mainly at the behest of the famous radical revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre and other radical revolutionaries who formed the club names Jacobins.

2.5.2 Reign of Terror

It was the darkest period of the Revolution, spanning from September 1793 to July 1794, characterized by extreme violence. It was orchestrated by the radical Jacobins after removing the group of moderate radicals called Girondins from any powerful positions. The Jacobins then terrorized anyone who they thought were going to negatively affect the Revolution. They also guillotined Marie Antoinette in October 1793 on the charges of treason like her husband King Louis XVI. With the execution of Marie Antoinette, the Reign of Terror gained greater momentum, removing anyone who posed as an obstacle or threat to the cause of the Revolution. Maximilien Robespierre rose to power during this time and was instrumental in successfully carrying out The Terror. He was in a continuous battle against the other prominent revolutionaries, testing their loyalties to the cause and accused many of them as being threats to the Revolution's success. He even ordered the guillotine of those whom he thought were disloyal to the Revolution including anyone who urged for the end of the Reign of Terror such as Danton, thereby making his way up to the top of the National Convention. Robespierre also began a new religion of the Supreme Being which had new ways of celebrating the religion. It was created in opposition to the hierarchical Church-based religion that Robespierre and the revolutionaries in general

thought to be corrupt. He celebrated the Supreme Being Festival in Paris on 8th June 1794 even though it upset many of the other revolutionaries. Robespierre angered many of the leaders and members of the Revolution by saying that he had a list of those among them who were enemies of the Revolution and threatened to expose those names. The revolutionaries finally ordered the arrest of Robespierre on 28th July 1794 and was guillotined that same day. The Reign of Terror thus ended and the National Convention was replaced by the Directory in 1795 which tried to undo the excesses of the Reign of Terror by taking various measures such as ending mass executions which had ran into tens of thousands by the time Robespierre was executed. The Directory too was overthrown in 1799 by a coup d'état carried out by Napoleon Bonaparte and was replaced by the French Consulate with himself as the First Consul. With the establishment of the Consulate, the French Revolution was more or less over.

2.5.3 Effects of the French Revolution

As has already been mentioned, the French Revolution had a decisive impact on world politics and on the way humans were viewed in the modern world. Many French citizens fled their nation to other parts of Europe and even to the United States of America as a result of the violence of the Revolution and it led to the spread of French culture, way of life and ideas to different parts of Europe and America. Yet, the most profound effects of the Revolution were seen in the realm of politics, ideology and religion. Let us go through some of the major effects briefly:

1. *End of Bourbon Rule* – The dynasty of Bourbon that had ruled France for more than four centuries had finally come to an end as a result of the Revolution with the abolition of monarchy in 1792. A republican form of government was established in its place. Even though the monarchy did resurface after Napoleon was defeated in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, it finally ended in 1830 in the July Revolution.
2. *Changes in the Structure of Land Ownership* – The French Revolution abolished the exploitative system of taxes that were usurped from the peasants by the first and second estates. The church took tithes or one-tenth of the annual produce of farmers as taxes while the feudal lords had near complete control over their vassals including their produce. By abolishing these taxes, the French Revolution led to the creation of independent small farmers in the villages.
3. *Changes in the Powers of the Church* – The French Catholic Church had been the most powerful religious body in France for centuries and even fuelled the

power and authority of the monarchy. The revolutionaries wanted to do away with the power that the Church had which was not only economically exploitative but even ideologically harmful because it controlled thoughts and ideas of the people of France. They tried to remove the Catholic Church-based religion from the socio-political fabric of France through such measures as changing the seven days of the week and removing Christian holidays like Easter and Christmas. It also tried to set up a new religion based on the idea of atheism which was named the Cult of Reason. The French Revolution, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment led to the complete destruction of powers of the Church. The taxes it levied were abolished, its nuns and priests exposed and sentenced to death or exile and its property brought under the direct control of the State. Later on Napoleon did give back the Church some of its traditional duties and authority with the Concordat of 1801 but even then, the Church was no longer as powerful and influential as it used to be before the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

4. *Birth of New Ideologies* –The French Revolution is most well-known for the ideological changes it brought about in not only France but in Europe and gradually in the rest of the world. The Revolution, using the temper of rationality that was born during the Enlightenment, demanded rational justification for the establishment of a government that was to be considered as legitimate. Ideological alternatives were born as a result of the Revolution which were to be used for the justification of governments. Major ideologies that emerged included democracy, liberalism, nationalism and socialism. The French Revolution inspired the birth of the modern nation-state of France and demanded from its residents allegiance and loyalty which formed the crux of the term nationalism. Liberalism was another new ideology that was created during the French Revolution which subsumed within itself ideas of liberty and equality. The defining slogan of the Revolution was *liberty, equality, fraternity*. The idea of liberalism also led to the establishment of universal male suffrage or the rights of all adult males to vote in France without any constraints whatsoever. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789 was one of the pillars of liberalism in France. It abolished the dues that poor peasants owed their feudal lords and also guaranteed the citizens basic rights like liberty, security, ownership of property and resistance to oppression. The abolition of the feudal system around the same time that led to greater equality among the people was another defining aspect of French liberalism. The Revolution also

led to the birth of democratic ideals even though France itself was not established as a democracy during this time. It inspired other nations to overthrow their monarchical governments and establish democracies instead.

Do You Know

The term *ideology* was coined during the French Revolution to denote the new ideas regarding socio-political organization of the French society.

The French Revolution thus brought about major changes in the French society, inspired by the Enlightenment. It in turn inspired revolutions in different parts of the world, bringing about what is often referred to as the Age of Revolutions. Some of the important revolutions that occurred as a result of the French Revolution were the Irish Rebellion (1798), the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), Italian revolutions (1848), etc. The French Revolution, thus, helped in the emancipation of numerous other peoples from their monarchical rulers which led to the establishment of republics and liberal democracies in many parts of the world.

Things to Do

Find out which other revolutions in Europe or America were inspired by the French Revolution and how.

2.6 Check your Progress

2.6.1 Answer in Detail

1. Explain the causes behind the French Revolution.
2. Discuss the major effects of the French Revolution.
3. How was the French Revolution a watershed in modern socio-political environment?

2.6.2 Answer Briefly

1. Write a note on the Reign of Terror.
2. What is the significance of the Storming of the Bastille?
3. How did the Enlightenment ideas influence the French Revolution?

2.7 Conclusion

This unit provides a comprehensive overview of two pivotal events in world history: the American and French Revolutions. The exploration begins with the American Revolution, examining its causes, including the grievances against British colonial policies and the profound influence of Enlightenment ideas such as liberty, equality, and democratic governance. The revolution's lasting effects, including the establishment of a new republic and its global impact on other independence movements, are discussed in detail.

Following this, the unit delves into the French Revolution, exploring the underlying causes such as economic distress, social inequality, and the influence of Enlightenment thought. The French Revolution, more radical in its course, led to significant changes in French society, including the Reign of Terror, which exposed the darker aspects of revolutionary zeal. The revolution's broader effects, including the end of feudalism and the rise of republicanism, significantly reshaped European politics.

By comparing both revolutions, the unit highlights how Enlightenment ideals played a crucial role in inspiring both movements and shaping their outcomes. Together, the American and French Revolutions set the stage for modern concepts of democracy, citizenship, and human rights, influencing political thought and revolutionary activity across the globe. Students are encouraged to reflect on how these historical events continue to shape contemporary political ideologies and societal structures.

2.8 Summary

Both the Revolutions, French and American, had the desire to set up new forms of government that were republican in nature and had at their roots the ideology of liberty. There were distinct differences between the two too. The American Revolution was waged to preserve the traditional aspects of its society and politics in the face of the British colonists but the French Revolution was waged for the complete upheaval and uprooting of anything traditional or the ancient regime including the church. The American Revolution gave the world the Declaration of Independence which was a document that stated the responsibilities of the Americans towards their motherland. The French Revolution gave the Declaration of the Rights of Man which was a document about the rights that a person should have in the modern day and age such as liberty, security, ability to own property, etc. The American

Revolution did not bring about any major changes in religion but one of the main aims of the French Revolution was to bring down the exploitative Catholic Church and its clergy. The Cult of Reason was more influential in the French Revolution than in the American one with philosophers like Voltaire and Rousseau aiding in the spread of this new atheistic religion as an opposition to the church. While Locke's ideas led to the growth of a constitution in America with controlled powers, Rousseau spoke of the "general will" which was the same as absolute power and often the cause of totalitarian regimes in many parts of Europe and the world since his ideas became popular. Another point of difference was how the leaders of the revolutions were treated by fellow members. While the leaders of the American Revolution were rather successful in carrying out the revolution and leading America to its freedom, the French revolutionaries, in contrast, were known to be violent and were also the causes of deaths of many fellow leaders and revolutionaries. Robespierre was the most famous for being violent with those of the ancient regime as well as with other revolutionaries.

There are many more points of convergence and divergence than what have been mentioned here. The fact remains that both revolutions were important events that shaped the modern political structures and processes of the entire world and were influenced by the new ideologies of the Enlightenment in France and some other parts of Europe. The massive upheavals brought about by these revolutions (including the Industrial Revolution) in the societies of Europe and America became an impetus to the growth of Sociology as much as it was influenced by the ideas of empiricism, rationalism and objectivity of the Enlightenment.

2.9 Questions

Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the major causes of the American Revolution. How did the colonists' grievances against British rule lead to the outbreak of revolution?
2. Analyze the impact of Enlightenment ideas on the American Revolution. How did concepts like liberty, equality, and democracy influence the revolutionaries?
3. Explain the significant effects of the American Revolution. How did it impact the newly formed United States and the broader world?
4. What were the primary causes of the French Revolution? Discuss the political, social, and economic factors that contributed to its outbreak.

5. Describe the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution. What were its causes, key events, and outcomes?
6. Examine the effects of the French Revolution. How did it reshape French society and influence global politics?

Short Answer Questions

1. What were some key causes of the American Revolution?
2. How did the Enlightenment influence the leaders of the American Revolution?
3. Name two major effects of the American Revolution.
4. List the main causes of the French Revolution.
5. What was the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution?
6. Mention two significant effects of the French Revolution.

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Unit 3 □ Industrial Revolution

Structure

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3.1. Learning Objectives

- To learn about how the Industrial Revolution began and where.
- To know the causes behind the Revolution.
- To learn about the defining features of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent impacts it had on European society.
- To learn about some of the most important innovations associated with the Industrial Revolution.
- To gain an idea about how the Industrial Revolution is linked to sociology.

3.2 Introduction

The Industrial Revolution began in around 1780 (although older historians have marked the beginning year of the Revolution as 1760) in Britain and spread to other parts of Europe and United States of America and continued well into the mid-1800s. This revolution is now referred to as the First Industrial Revolution and there have been more industrial revolutions in different parts of the world since then and there is no real end to Industrial Revolution per se. The Industrial Revolution broke out even before the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. In its essence, Industrial Revolution signifies the change in the process of production in human society as a result of new manufacturing technology that was being developed from about the 1760s in Europe, mostly Britain. This transition resulted in the ability of Britain to carry out limitless self-sustained growth at a rapid and continuous pace. Production gradually began to take place inside large-scale factories rather than in small workshops with more and more automation as time went by.

The developments that led to this transition were not sudden of course but were a result of centuries of trials and experiments which only became rapid and effective from the 16th century onwards. The most prominent effects of the Industrial Revolution were seen in the development of railways and heavy industries, especially the iron and steel industry. These developments were used first in the textile industry. Britain was able to carry on with this rapid industrial development mainly because of its political policies which allowed easy trade and abundance of raw material and labour which could be sourced from its various colonies. Many social scientists believe that the Industrial Revolution happened in Britain because of these factors more than because of scientific and technological developments. The initial technological changes were rather low-key and modest and did not require much skill to be developed by small-scale experiments of artisans or carpenters or other such professionals. Such innovations were happening not just in Britain but in other parts of Europe too. It was because of the British government's urge to make private profits and aiding the entrepreneurs in doing this that Britain was able to industrialize at a revolutionary pace and scale. Thus, the First Industrial Revolution may be thought of more as a result of political and economic decisions of a government than due to massive and ground-breaking scientific and technological advancement.

The Industrial Revolution led to immense progress in production and growth of economies. A major change that emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution was

the growth of urban centres around the factories with people migrating from rural to urban areas, thus inducing urbanisation. However, at the same time, it also led to severe poverty and other social evils by bringing about massive changes in the social lives of the people. In any case, let us go through the first Industrial Revolution of the world in greater details.

Do You Know

The term Industrial Revolution was coined by Arnold Toynbee to describe Britain's economic growth as a result of new mechanisms of production between 1760 and 1840.

3.3 Causes

The major cause behind the growth of the Industrial Revolution was probably the birth of laissez-faire capitalism. However, there are other causes behind its emergence as well. Let us understand briefly what some of these causes were.

1. **Laissez-faire Capitalism:** Laissez-faire capitalism means free-market form of capitalism. This implies that the government is to stay out of economic matters and it should allow individual citizens to carry out economic activities based on the needs of the market alone without any hindrances. This was in stark contrast to the mercantile economy which was heavily controlled by monarchs. The idea of laissez-faire capitalism was first propounded by Adam Smith in his famous book *The Wealth of Nations* published in 1776. He introduced the concept of the “invisible hand” of the market, denoted by the cycle of demand and supply, which would automatically control the market and prices without the need for government control or involvement. The British government went by this laissez-faire method of capital growth which allowed individual capitalists to use their wealth in setting up factories in the country. The capitalists then used their profits to further expand their production, thereby gaining even more profits and using it for continuous industrial development. The only things that the British industrialist needed for such free-market capitalistic industrial development were – such an industry that would help the capitalist make quick growth with some cheap and simple technological innovations and a large market which it could monopolize. Such an industry was to be the cotton industry for the British capitalists and the market it could monopolize was not just the national market but worldwide markets, including its colonies which were also its sources of cheap raw material

and labour. Thus, it was through unbridled market-driven capitalism that the British government encouraged that the First Industrial Revolution was possible in Britain.

2. Colonization: The Age of Imperialism that followed the Age of Exploration in Europe was a major impetus to the growth of industrial system of production in Britain and the rest of Europe. Imperialism, or the control of another territory through military, political or economic means, was carried out by many European nations following the Age of Exploration. Some of the major imperialist countries of Europe were Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, etc. These countries began controlling large parts of the world such as the Americas, Africa, Australia, India, China, etc. from about the 15th century with Christopher Columbus's voyages of discovery. Britain, due to its attitude of laissez-faire capitalism, utilized its colonies the most for the development of its industries. The colonies of Britain became the major sources of raw material and labour for its industries.

The Trade Triangle was developed in the Atlantic Ocean for this purpose and it connected Britain and other European countries with North and South Americas and resources moved from the Americas to Europe. The goods produced with these resources used to be sold in African colonies in exchange for slaves who would be transferred to the Americas to work on plantations where raw material for the European factories, especially cotton textile industry, were being produced. Indian cotton was one of the most sought-after raw materials for the British and the East India Company that was begun as a trading front between India and Britain soon began to control India politically and it became much easier for them to gather raw cotton from India for its cotton industries back home. Thus, the policy of colonization of different parts of the world meant that European countries and especially Britain could seamlessly establish and maintain industries because it bought raw materials from its colonies at cheap rates, used the labour power of the colonists and sold them the finished products. The Industrial Revolution was more a result of massive opportunities of profitable export to colonies rather than due to a strong home market. Thus, overall, colonization was a major cause behind the growth of the Industrial Revolution.

3. Coal: The discovery of coal as an excellent source of power was another important factor that gave impetus to the growth of European industries. The steam engine was probably the most important innovation that helped in the growth of industries and led to the Industrial revolution. Coal powered steam engines helped in the operation of factory machinery and became the driving force behind railways and

ships which were important in transporting raw material and finished goods across different parts of the world. The railways especially became extremely important in the Industrial Revolution. Britain had a rich reserve of coal which were also easily obtainable, thereby making the exploitation of coal reserves for the development of industries an easy matter for British capitalists.

Coal mining itself became easier as a result of the coal-powered steam engine. The discovery of hard coal also led to the establishment of a large iron and steel industrial base in Britain. Britain did have an iron industry even in the early 1700s but it was based on the inefficient charcoal. The discovery of hard coal led to the efficient use of fuel in the iron and steel industry, leading to its exponential expansion. In fact, the iron and steel industry in fact was also another indispensable industry itself that led to further development of other industries at rapid paces, thereby once again leading to the Industrial Revolution. Iron began to be used in place of timber for numerous reasons, especially in the sphere of construction. The iron and steel industry therefore aided in the process of mechanization and more efficient methods of production of various other goods. Thus, the discovery of coal was another important cause behind the Industrial Revolution.

4. Agriculture: The Agricultural Revolution that had happened in Britain between the 17th and 19th centuries was marked by an unprecedented increase in the agricultural production of Britain due to new methods of farming being introduced. These new methods included crop rotation, the Enclosure Movement, using the drill to sow seeds instead of doing it by hand, etc. New crops were discovered such as potato, corn, etc. All these factors led to better productivity and thereby decreased hunger and malnutrition among the general population of Britain. This meant that Britain's population began to increase. As a result of this increase in population, Britain now had a sizeable indigenous labour force to work in its factories and mines. It also had a large national market for its manufactured goods. The Enclosure Movement, which led to the private ownership of common rural lands, was another factor that aided the Industrial Revolution. Since land was taken away from the common farmers and given to private cultivators, therefore a large proportion of the rural population were landless and, therefore, without dependable sources of income. This automatically led them to migrate from the rural hinterland to the nearby towns and cities in search for employment and they were then absorbed into the newly emerging factories as cheap labour. Thus, the Agricultural Revolution had a major role to play in the Industrial Revolution.

5. Transport: The internal transport system of Britain was being developed at a rapid pace with the creation of the Turnpike trust in the 1750s. The Turnpike trust was a group of people who were entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the road network in Britain full-time and they received a toll in exchange for it. This meant that the British road network was well-maintained. The canal system was also built which provided a cheap and dependable mode of transportation. Before the development of steam power, the boats that plied on these canals were pulled by horses that walked on tow-paths on either side of the canals. After the steam engine was developed, horse drawn boats gave way to boats powered by the steam engine. The invention of the steam engine also meant that a long network of railways could be laid across the land of Britain that would again help in easy, cost-effective and time-effective transportation of people and material over long distances. The earliest railway tracks linked the coal mines to rivers and canals and the carriages were pulled by horses. Like with the canal system, railways also developed exponentially with the invention of the steam engine and then the iron and steel industry. The mechanization of the transportation system was one of the prime factors that aided in revolutionizing industrial production in Britain first and gradually in other parts of Europe.

Things to Do

Find out more about the Enclosure Movement and its importance in the Agricultural Revolution.

Thus, these were some of the factors that were important causes behind the First Industrial Revolution. The Revolution was a result of prolonged years of small-scale innovations and developments which finally led to the sudden increase in productive capacity as a result of mechanization and some other socio-political factors as discussed above. Now let us learn about some of the major features of the Industrial Revolution.

3.4 Features

The Industrial Revolution was not as revolutionary as one might think. It was a rather piecemeal development over a long period of time with small-scale technological innovations mostly by private artisans and other semi-skilled professionals that did not use much scientific knowledge but resulted from simple experimentation. However, what was revolutionary about the Industrial Revolution was that there was a sudden growth in output as a result of greater and greater mechanization of the production

process. The following points were some of the main features of the Industrial Revolution:

1. Human skills in the production process began to be substituted by machine power. Machine-based production meant that the process was much faster with much larger quantities of continuous output that were reliable to be of the exact same quality.
2. The use of inanimate sources of power since the invention of the steam engine and the discovery of coal meant that human or animal-based sources of power could be done away with. Inanimate sources of power were not only cheaper but also were more reliable compared to animate sources of power. Productivity could be continued and increased exponentially if these inanimate sources of power were used since they were unlimited in supply compared to the productive capacity of human or animal labour power.
3. New and abundant raw materials began to be used for production, thereby opening up wide varieties of things that could be produced and at cheaper rates. Animal-based raw material began to be substituted with minerals, wood began to be substituted with coal as a source of energy, etc.
4. The continuous rise in per capita income and exponential increase in profits for the capitalists. The economic benefits of the Revolution, however, accrued most to the already wealthy rather than to the labourers in the factories who were usually exploited by the capitalists for increased productivity and profits.
5. Over time, the Revolution was characterized by the use of newer sources of energy such as crude oil and later on electricity in the 19th century. With the beginning of the use of electricity for industrial purposes, historians say that the Second Industrial Revolution had started and it was characterized by much greater use of scientific knowledge than the First Industrial Revolution was based upon. Electrical power was mostly used in the United States of America at the beginning, with the iconic assembly-line production system being introduced as a result of electrical power.

Things to Do

Find out who were behind the inventions of electricity and assembly-line production system.

Thus, the major features of the Industrial Revolution seem to have positive impacts over the economic situation of Britain and gradually in other countries of Europe and America as it spread there. However, there was a dark side to the Revolution as well which shall be discussed later on.

3.5 Check your Progress

3.5.1. Answer in Detail

1. What do you understand by the term Industrial Revolution? What are some of the main features of the Revolution?
2. Explain the major causes behind the Industrial Revolution.

5.2. Answer Briefly

1. How did colonization help Britain to industrialize?
2. It is believed by many historians now that the Industrial Revolution was not as revolutionary as one might assume. Why is it so?

3.6 Major Impacts

The Industrial Revolution has had some major negative impacts on British society where it started while it was a boon for the British capitalists. They are discussed as follows:

1. **Working Conditions of Labourers:** Apart from an impact on productive capacity of nations, the Industrial Revolution had a major impact on the labour force. This impact was, however, negative for the most part. Since industries were owned by capitalists, therefore profit was the most important motive that drove these industries and as a result it was easy for labourers, who made up about eighty per cent of the British population at that time, to be exploited. In the early years of the Revolution when productivity had not taken-off yet, there was an acute shortage of jobs in factories for labourers who had migrated from rural areas. These labourers were happy to get any job they could in order to survive and this made it easy for capitalists to exploit them by offering them extremely low wages, setting abnormally long working hours such as ten to fourteen hours six days a week without the option of taking days off, making them work in dangerous and unhygienic conditions with no protection

from accidents, no insurance, no compensation whatsoever. If a labourer was incapacitated due to an accident on the job then he was simply left unemployed. Besides these problems, the labourers, who were originally farmers, had to now learn to adjust to new ways of working in the factories which were completely different from life on the farm. They had to learn to adjust to clock-time as opposed to measuring time by sunlight. They had to learn to work fast without interruptions for many hours at a stretch as opposed to working for stipulated hours on the field and then being involved in free time or other chores. Most importantly, they were no longer their own bosses and had to work under the tight, almost draconian, rules of the capitalist employer. The capitalists also began to employ female and child labourers because their prices were even lower compared to the male workers. Children were in fact preferred for many jobs because of their small size which would allow them to fit into small places where adults could not fit. The social menace of child labour thus begun. Through all these measures, the capitalists could gain a large amount of profit for very little investment in labour. The British government, in fact, made it illegal for workers to unionize and demand better working conditions by passing the Combination Acts in 1799 and 1800. Moreover, the Industrial Revolution also led to large-scale unemployment of artisans and craftsmen who used to make products by hand before their production became mechanized and taken over by capitalists.

2. Living Conditions of Labourers: The labourers had no other option but to live in slums in different parts of the cities because they could not afford better housing. The British government had set up poorhouses for the poorest of the workforce through the Poor Law of 1834. The poorhouses were built with cheap material and poor designs, usually lacking windows or any sources of ventilation. Many of these poorhouses also did not have running water facilities meaning that labourers often had to go without bathing and proper hygiene for days until they could arrange for some alternative options. The poor houses were almost like prisons where spouses could not even stay together in the same room in order to ensure maximum discipline and least camaraderie and pleasure among workers. They could barely afford their food and rent. The cities were characterized by overcrowding, terrible sanitation and hygiene facilities and the inevitable spread of different diseases and illnesses such as cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid, etc. Such pathetic living conditions obviously led to pollution. Sewage was usually dumped into rivers leading to water

pollution and further spread of diseases. Life expectancy reduced drastically in the urban industrialized areas. It was as low as 26 years in Liverpool while in rural areas it was about 45 years. Public health suffered as a direct result of the living conditions and lack of nutrition due to the extreme poverty of the working class.

3. **Impact on Women:** The status of women fell as capitalism rose upwards due to the Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution began and traditional agricultural societies were common in Europe, the entire family worked as a single unit of production with each family member working together. No one kind of work was earmarked for one specific gender. Women were as involved in producing various things as they were in bearing and rearing children. With the factory system of work, a gendered division of labour emerged in which men were to work outside the home in factories and women were to stay back at home looking after household chores and children. Later on when women and even children were slowly induced into the labour force their wages remained much lower compared to the already low wages of men because it was believed that women were not capable of performing tasks that required any skill, thereby relegating them to the most monotonous and unimportant aspects of the production process. The health of women suffered considerably too, especially their reproductive health since they were expected to reproduce more and more labour for the rapidly growing industrial societies. Women would give birth to as many as ten children in many families in order to be able to add more numbers to the workforce. Women, of course, had to share the double burden of working in factories all day long and at home before and after working hours which again impacted their health and strength negatively. The only benefit that women of the working class seem to have derived from providing their labour to industrialists was earning a meagre wage which would help them and their family members scrape out a survival.
4. **Impact on the Environment:** The current poor environmental condition may well be traced back to the Industrial Revolution when, as a result of the sudden growth of coal powered industries and intense mining activities, pollution of the air and water resources began. The growth in transportation facilities, the rise in the populations of cities and towns due to urbanization and poor sanitation facilities among the labouring class were all contributors to pollution and also caused health hazards as already discussed. Natural resources were being depleted at an ever-growing rate. New chemicals were being invented and new

sources of fuel were being discovered and using these in the process of production caused more and more pollution. The negative impact on the environment began with the First Industrial Revolution and only kept increasing over the course of subsequent Industrial Revolutions.

5. **Growth of a Middle-Class:** The gradual growth of the need of white-collar, service-based jobs such as bankers, merchants, lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc. led to the development of a middle-class population who were neither as rich as the capitalists nor as poor as the working-class. Their income was in the form of monthly or yearly salaries rather than profits as was for the capitalists or hourly wages as was for the labourers. The middle-classes were wealthy enough to be able to hire domestic workers from the labouring class at cheap rates. The middle-class family was created as a space that was completely separate from the worries of work unlike the families of the labouring class or even of the capitalists. In these families there was a strict and patriarchal division of labour based on gender according to which women were supposed to be within the home, looking after the household and the children and the men were supposed to be the breadwinners for the whole family. The children of the middle-class were also sent to school to be educated. The children became the responsibility of the parents who would have to look after their education, healthcare and overall security and proper upbringing. Infant mortality rate and birth rate reduced considerably among the middle-classes due to access to good healthcare facilities. The urban middle-class, thus, formed an important section of the industrialized society and this class was born as a result of the new requirements in society and economy that the Industrial Revolution brought about.

Therefore, the above were some of the major impacts of the Industrial Revolution. There were more negative impacts of the Revolution than positive ones. Exploitation of labourers as well as of natural resources were almost the hallmark impacts of the Revolution. The negative impacts only went on becoming more and more intense with subsequent Industrial Revolutions.

3.7 Major Innovations

The Industrial Revolution led to some major innovations that not only helped in the growth and further spread of the Revolution but also aided social life in general. Interestingly enough, most of these innovations did not always result out of years of

scientific and technological experimentation and research but was based on already acquired knowledge from experience. The Industrial Revolution also did not see an immediate and widespread use of these new innovations but were used by small numbers of industries alongside the traditional methods of production. Some of the most important innovations were:

1. **Steam Engine:** The coal-powered steam engine was probably the most defining innovation of the First Industrial Revolution. It was invented by Thomas Newcomen in 1712 and improved upon by James Watt in around 1769. Watt's design was able to save fuel and therefore became the most popular form of steam engine. The coal-consuming steam engine was used not only in large, mechanized factories but was also an important development in the transport system of Britain because it led to the development of railways and steam-boats. It made transportation a much easier and faster process. Even though traditional sources of power like wind and water-based energy were still important in the 19th century but the coal-consuming steam engine was gaining importance fast.
2. **Iron and Steel Industry:** This was the most important innovation for factories and all other construction work. Iron was required for the construction of factories, machinery, railways, bridges, etc. The use of hard coal in the iron industry made it more efficient. In the second half of the 19th century liquid-steel production began and steel began to be used widely in railways. Over time Britain began producing high-quality steel. The iron and steel industry became an embodiment of a nation's power. Britain, therefore, was considered to be one of the most powerful nations on the planet during the First Industrial Revolution.
3. **Electricity:** The use of electricity in industrial processes may well have been the starting point of the Second Industrial Revolution. Initially electricity was used in telegraphic communication but slowly it began to be used in industries as well when in the 1860s the self-excited generator's working principle was finally discovered. One of the most well-known people associated with this discovery was the German gentleman Werner von Siemens. The electrical light bulb was also created around this time by the British Joseph Swan and the American Thomas Edison. With gradual developments regarding the use of electricity in the most efficient and widespread manner, it began to be finally used in industries by the mid-19th century.

4. **New Methods of Manufacturing:** By the second phase of the Industrial Revolution, the American manufacturing capabilities had surpassed those of Britain owing to certain innovations such as the electric bulb by Edison, the assembly-line production system by Henry Ford and scientific management of the production process by Frederick Taylor. Assembly-line production is the process of production in which the manufacturing of a single product is broken down into several separate parts as per a pre-defined sequence. In such a production system, each labourer is supposed to do only one single part of the entire production job day in and day out rather than them producing the full product from start to finish. This form of manufacturing is ideal for mass production and was begun by Henry Ford in his Model T car manufacturing units. Scientific management may be understood as knowing exactly what to do in the production process for maximization of output and how to do it in the most cost and time effective manner. It is dedicated to the use of scientific methods to manage the production process to make it most efficient. These two methods of manufacturing were two of the most important innovations of the Industrial Revolution, albeit in its second phase, and were based on a much higher degree of scientific research and input compared to the first phase of the Revolution.

These innovations had helped in the further growth on industrialization all over Europe and America and gradually had spread to other parts of the globe as a result of colonization and globalization. The Industrial Revolution also had a major social impact that led to social scientists and philosophers developing various theories to explain the chaos that the First Industrial Revolution and before that the French Revolution had left behind.

3.8 Check your Progress

3.8.1. Answer in Detail

1. In what ways were the labourers impacted as a result of the Industrial Revolution?
2. Discuss in detail the major impacts of the Industrial Revolution on different aspects of society and nature.
3. Write a note on the major innovations that resulted from the first and second phases of the Industrial Revolution.

8.2. Answer Briefly

1. How were women affected by the Industrial Revolution?
2. Who were the middle-classes in the industrialized British society?
3. What were the most important innovations in industry that were developed in the USA? Discuss them briefly.

3.9 Conclusion

The Industrial Revolution had major social impacts as is clear from the above discussion by now. Urbanization, rural-urban migration, new methods of work, rise of middle-classes, the exploitation of labour, the status of women and even the environmental damage were some of the most important effects and pressing concerns of the Industrial Revolution. All these factors had led to some major social upheavals such as the rise of labour unions and their revolts against the capitalists as well as the ideas of socialism and communism. Auguste Comte, the founding father of sociology, created this discipline inspired by other philosophers before him like St. Simon to make sense of the new chaotic world that the French and Industrial Revolutions had brought in. He realized that the existing social sciences like political science, economics, history, etc. were not enough to adequately explain the new society that was being formed as result of the Revolutions. Apart from him, the capitalist system of industrial production led to many sociologists creating theories to explain the changes. Max Weber theorized on the link between religion and the rise of capitalism and Durkheim talked about the new form of division of labour that emerged in the industrialized society characterized by organic solidarity.

One of the most important sociological theories to develop as a result of the effects of the Industrial Revolution was Karl Marx's theory of class and class struggle in which he clearly defined the two major social classes of the industrialized European society, i.e., the proletariat or working class and the bourgeois or the capitalist class. He explained the exploitation of the former class by the latter and the resultant struggle that the proletariat would wage on the bourgeois to overthrow them and create a classless society. Marx's theories led to the popularization of communist and socialist ideologies. While the first phase of Industrial Revolution led to the birth of sociology, subsequent phases led to the further development of the discipline to explain the effects of the new changes by brought about by new forms of industrialization. Sociology has also helped explain and put into perspective the changes

that stemmed from the birth of the *post-industrial society* marked by service jobs instead of industrial jobs.

3.10 Summary

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century in Britain and spread to Europe and North America, was a pivotal era of transformation from agrarian societies to industrial powerhouses. This period was driven by advancements in agriculture, which boosted food production and population growth, and by significant technological innovations like the steam engine and Spinning Jenny that revolutionized production processes. The factory system and mechanization led to rapid urbanization and changes in labour practices, while improvements in transportation such as railroads facilitated the movement of goods and people. The revolution brought about substantial economic growth and industrial output but also led to social upheaval, including poor working conditions, child labour, and environmental pollution. Overall, the Industrial Revolution marked a profound shift in global economic and social structures, laying the foundation for modern industrial society.

3.11 Questions

3.11.1. Answer in Detail

1. Explain how agricultural advancements contributed to the Industrial Revolution.
2. Describe the impact of technological innovations on the Industrial Revolution.
3. Discuss the social impacts of the Industrial Revolution on urban and rural areas.
4. Analyze the environmental effects of the Industrial Revolution.

3.11.2. Answer Briefly

1. What caused the Industrial Revolution?
2. Name two features of the Industrial Revolution.
3. What is one social impact of the Industrial Revolution?
4. List one major innovation of the Industrial Revolution.

3.12 References

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Unit 4 □ University Revolution

Structure

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4.1 Learning Objectives

- **Trace the Historical Evolution of Universities:** Explain the development of medieval universities, their transformation through the university revolution, and their lasting impact on modern higher education.
- **Evaluate the Role of Key Institutions and Thinkers:** Analyze the

contributions of early universities like Bologna and Halle, and assess the influence of Christian Thomasius in shaping academic freedom and interdisciplinary learning.

- **Connect Educational Reforms to Modern Sociology:** Understand how the university revolution laid the groundwork for sociology by promoting critical inquiry and integrating diverse fields of study into higher education curricula.

4.2 Introduction

The collapse of the Roman Empire in the fourth century created a period of anarchy and economic crisis across Europe. The intellectual climate changed drastically, and large numbers of books and papers were lost or destroyed. The overall need for learned men fell in parallel with the decline of trade, economics, and local administration. Greek and Roman learning was preserved in Eastern Europe in the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Empire, lasting over 1,000 years from its founding by Emperor Constantine the Great in 330 AD until its fall in 1453, was a shining continuation of the Roman Empire. Its capital, Constantinople, was strategically located and heavily fortified, making it a center of culture and wealth during the Middle Ages. The Byzantine Empire is famous for preserving and passing on the knowledge and heritage of ancient Greece and Rome at a time when Western Europe was facing chaos. It protected against invasions from many hostile forces like the Persians, Arabs, and later the Ottoman Turks.

The Byzantines made significant contributions to art, architecture, law, and religion, with achievements like the codification of Roman laws in the Corpus Juris Civilis, the architectural marvel of the Hagia Sophia, and the spread of Orthodox Christianity. The empire's beautiful mosaics, grand churches, and effective administrative systems have left a lasting impact on history, shaping the cultural and political landscapes of Europe and the Middle East. Understanding the Byzantine Empire's long rise and eventual fall provides valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of human civilizations.

Over time Islamic scholars absorbed and spread the ancient texts throughout the Middle East. In Western Europe, the few surviving texts were scattered in monastery libraries. However, the early medieval monks were more interested in theological and philosophical texts than pagan mathematics or science, so few copies were made of such works. Over the centuries, many surviving ancient texts decayed into dust or

were destroyed in wars and other disasters. For a more illustrative understanding, the map of Europe has been given.

Picture.1: Map of Europe

<https://animalia-life.club/qa/pictures/printable-map-of-europe-labeled>

4.2.1 The essence of the medieval learning

Latin was the language of the monks and the surviving texts were rewritten in abbreviated medieval style of Latin, often based on poor translations from Greek. Over time, the curriculum of medieval learning became set, based on large compendiums of simplified Greek knowledge compiled by encyclopedists such as Boethius (480-524). Medieval learning was based on the seven liberal arts. The quadrivium (four) were mathematically based, comprising arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, but these were much less popular than the linguistic trivium (three) of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, which led to further study in theology, philosophy, medicine, and law. The main demand for higher education was within the church, and most students were clergy, as were their teachers.

4.2.2 The contact with the East in the 11th Century: Encounters with the Orient

In the eleventh century new contact with the East, in the form of the Crusades, helped to recover lost ancient knowledge. While the Crusades were mainly destructive and religious-driven wars, there were some positive outcomes for European society. Western scholars came to realize that Islamic intellectuals had a storehouse of ancient learning wider than their own. The Arabic scholars had added new material to the classics, either on their own, or by absorbing the intellectual traditions of nearby cultures such as Hindus and Babylonians. There was also contact with the Muslim world in Spain, the southern half of which was an Islamic state. Many European scholars traveled to Spain to learn Arabic and other so-called oriental languages.

European economics and politics slowly began to develop, and the growth in trade and government administration saw an increased need for literate and numerate scholars. The survival of ancient texts in Western monasteries had made them the focal points of medieval learning. The cathedral schools, especially those in capital cities or at pivotal trade routes, began to grow with the slow rise of trade and economic stability. These became centers for copying the new texts recovered from the East. While originally intended for religious study, various reforms made these schools accept secular students as well. As student numbers climbed, these centers of learning gradually evolved into universities.

4.3 The etymology of the term university: An early evolution

The word university originates from the term *universitas*, which originally meant any collection of professionals in a guild or organization. The motivations behind these corporations were to provide their members with protection from rival groups and enable price regulation and monopolies. Over time the term became narrowed to mean strictly a society of academics.

There is some debate among scholars about which particular place can be called the first university. The medical school at Salerno, in southern Italy, is often cited as the first university, or at least one of the first universities. Salerno was well known as a health resort from the ninth century. It was also a meeting place of Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Jewish learning, being a port situated on important trade routes. It became a *universitas* sometime in the twelfth century, and obtained formal recognition in 1231, but remained solely a medical school and did not influence the style and organization of later universities.

4.3.1 Bologna University: Phenomenal rise of higher education in Southern Europe

The *universitas* that was to inspire the majority of other institutions in southern Europe was Bologna. The Italian town had a law school of great renown, which attracted students from all over Europe, often from wealthy backgrounds. Like many medieval towns, Bologna discriminated against foreign residents. They were taxed at higher rates, charged more for lodging and food, had harsh laws imposed upon them, and were liable for military service. Near the end of the twelfth century the foreign law students at Bologna formed a union to provide protection from these local customs and laws. The students had to fight for their rights, and it took a three-year strike before their absence caused the authorities to give in to their demands.

It was soon discovered that students, were a vital part of the local economy, and so they could demand better treatment, or take their money elsewhere. They subsequently became an indispensable part of the community and earned their status thorough persistent effort. To keep the students at Bologna they were granted cheap rent, food, and taxes, as well as exception from military service and the right to set teaching fees.

Picture 2: Bologna University in Italy

<https://www.mediastorehouse.com/fine-art-storehouse/collections/heritage-images/bologna-university-11798442.html?nochip=1&prodid=7016>

In Paris, at around the same time, the teachers of that city formed themselves into a corporation, a *universitas magistrorum*. Students in Paris tended to be French, but their teachers were often foreign, and so organized themselves for protection and mutual benefit. Students were allowed to join the guild as junior members and, if they passed their examinations, could slowly advance up the corporate hierarchy. Paris was the model that later northern European universities followed.

4.3.2 The rise of Universities in the Medieval Europe

Universities began to spread across Europe. Often disputes within a university led to migrations of teachers and students and the formation of new universities. Migrations from Bologna led to the founding of Padua (1222). Further moves from Padua led to the creation of a university at Vercelli (1228). Some historians claim that up to half the universities of medieval Europe originated from such disputes. Universities also sprung up seemingly on their own, although usually following the organizational principles of either Bologna or Paris. By 1500, there were 62 recognized universities in Europe.

The fortunes of universities were closely tied to the towns they existed within, or near. Many famous schools, such as Oxford and Cambridge, were founded at busy commercial centers. There was often conflict between the town authorities and the academic guilds. Many riots occurred in the early history of universities, referred to as “town versus gown battles.” One of the questions at stake was who had legal authority over academics. Over time it became accepted that scholars could not be arrested or tortured by town authorities, except for murder. In effect, universities became independent entities with their own code of conduct and discipline.

In the early universities, lectures were usually held in the master’s room, or a hired hall, as these universities owned no buildings of their own. Classes consisted of a master reading aloud and commenting on an established text, while the students copied down the lecture word for word. This gave the students both the original text and a learned commentary on the work. Lecturers who spoke too softly, or too quickly, were often shouted at by their students, and in some cases attacked. As the lecturers relied on the fees paid by their students, teachers could be boycotted, and driven by economic necessity to alter their teaching or leave. The use of Latin as the academic language meant that academics could study and teach in any European country. University students and teachers were very mobile, often traveling to several institutions in their careers, and helped create a European wide sense of learning.

Universities taught the seven liberal arts and at least some of the advanced topics of theology, law, medicine, and philosophy. Many universities began to include practical courses in response to public demand. Courses in the art of letter writing trained the clerks, money-counters, and administrators of the flourishing economy.

4.4 The advent of disruptions and crisis in 14th century Europe

However, the era of growth did not last, as the fourteenth century was beset with famines, disease, and war. The conflict that came to be called The Hundred Years' War disrupted trade, and the plague known as the Black Death killed approximately a third of Europe's population. The universities continued as well as they could, although many were forced to suspend classes for extended periods. These disruptions had wider social implications, for while the twelfth century had been a time of expanding intellectual horizons, particularly with the influx of Arabic and ancient knowledge, the university curriculum now became fixed and rigidly taught.

By the sixteenth century many critics regarded the universities as places of backward, unimportant studies. University academics were accused of following their ancient sources too closely, while ignoring the dramatic changes in European religion, politics, economics, and wider discoveries of the world. Yet the universities survived and even flourished, for social changes had once again increased the demand for educated men to fill positions in commerce and administration, and the universities held a monopoly on higher learning. Universities continue to evolve today, and yet still retain some of their earliest characteristics, as formed in the medieval period.

4.5 The Student issues taking the Center Stage

The way the concept of University Revolution evolved in the middle age may appear to be strange, but it is not unreal; it is, in fact, associated with so many modern ideas, science, philosophical concepts and scientific discoveries. Just as it happens in the contemporary period, In the past too universities were quite vocal about their demands in which students and scholars used to take an active role. In the past political leaders like Lenin, Kon Bendt and others did take leading roles in students' movements in Russia and France, respectively; China and America were also not left behind. In these 'revolutions' students' demands took the centre stage and no other bigger issue like

altering the whole structure of the society ever cropped up in these movements. If we compare the university revolution of the middle ages in different countries of Europe, especially in Italy, we can easily understand that revolution was of a different nature – It helped reform the society by removing the dark veil of religiosity and by widening the horizon of knowledge. It also helped the society prepare a modern, scientific syllabus suitable for the emerging world. In our discussions on ‘university revolution’ we will try to explore the role of the main driving forces as well as of the agents of this revolution.

Free exercise of knowledge was hampered drastically in the Middle Ages because everything used to be guided and controlled by the Catholic Church; acquisition and application of scientific knowledge, too, had to face steep resistance from the Papal authority of that time. Gradually, with changes in the social order, the impact of the emergence of new types of aristocracy, urbanization, new types of trade and commerce, respect for modern education and modern approach to everything social became the order of the day. In their urge for a better education system they now started to demand less emphasis on Latin language and grammar and more on history, geography, genealogy, heraldry, politics side by side with training in different skills like riding, fencing, drawing, painting, music etc. In all over Europe, especially in Germany, Ritter Akademien or schools suitable for the social life of decent young men came to be established; in addition to that, via the impact of the Arab Muslim Renaissance, Europe started to be acquainted with the most precious books written by ancient scholars of Greece. Europe, at this point, was also inspired by knowledge in science and this led invariably to the establishment of a university in the year of 1300 as a seat for higher learning in the city of Aragon in Spain.

Except Academia of ancient Greece there was no other university in the western part of Europe. Following its steps at least 65 universities were established in different parts of Europe, except the territory under the Byzantium Empire, in the Middle Ages. By that time Europe experienced the impacts of Renaissance, Reformation and counter- Reformation; the Scientific Revolution (1500-1700) also left a deep impression both on the university education system and on the society as a whole. All these brought in a wide range of changes in the academic courses and syllabi at the higher education level and in University Revolution took shape at this juncture.

4.6 The dominant presence of medieval scholasticism in 16th century European system of education

Till sixteenth century, medieval scholasticism had a dominant presence in European system of education; but the situation changed under the popularity of Renaissance period humanism, Reformation and counter- Reformation. It is well known that the common people of Europe were freed from the shackles of Latin language and got an opportunity to learn in their own mother tongues only because of the heroic leadership of Martin Luther and his Reformation movement .By the 16th-17th centuries, all the past efforts towards changes in social life manifested themselves in a growing demand for right to education for the common people. For example, in Italy's Bologna University in the 16th century itself there were over one hundred professors to teach different subjects to its students in its two Faculties of Law and Arts. After the Protestant movement when the Catholic Church lost much of its power of control and authority, education became free of religious influence to a great extent and in this newly established secular environment universities gained new status. In due course of time, in all the Protestant states across the world secularism became one of the most coveted principles. Germany was a very powerful protestant state where the first 'university revolution' took shape in as early as 17th century.

Prior to the reformation movement the education system in Germany was very much under the rigid control of the Catholic Church that there was absolutely no academic freedom for the universities. Taking note of the situation, renowned German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716) refused to associate himself with any university of his time or to show any interest in changing them, though he was not at all averse to the idea of change. He was aware of the conditions of many other institutions of Germany and ushered in changes in many of them. His aversion towards German universities can reveal the state of affairs there. At this juncture , a group of scholars who referred themselves as 'enlightened despots' were determined to revive the old high standard and prestige of Germany's universities. This group was the pioneer of university revolution and the most prominent of them was Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) who taught first at Leiptzig University and then, after 1867, at Halle University.

In many of his class room lectures he used to comment boldly on the hypocrisy, orthodoxy, prejudice and superstition of German education system. In 1867 in one of his class room lectures he taught his students about the imitation of polite learning

, gallant wit and a good taste of the French without uttering anything about the actual course; his colleagues described the lecture as 'unexampled horror'. Thomasius was dismissed from his service at Leiptzig for his action but soon the Prussian government offered him a post of professor at Halle University.

4.7 Halle University: A Beacon of Enlightenment in Prussian Modernity

The state of Prussia of that time was far more modern and advanced in its ideas and principles than the other German states. At the beginning Halle University had two very famous teachers like rationalist Thomasius and spiritualist Francke amongst others; yet it had often been labeled as "The University of hell". But gradually it "became for a time the most liberal and distinguished university in Europe and the prototype of all those modern schools in which research and academic freedom have been cherished and fostered." Later, it bloomed into an important center of modern research and academic liberty.

In 1707 Christian Wolff joined Halle and since then its rational and scientific tendency started to improve; the government of Prussia took an active role in improving the standard of all the universities of the country. In the Konigsberg University Prussia's government introduced an encyclopedia in which philosophy was defined as "the ability to think and to investigate the nature of things without prejudices and without sectarianism." Natural sciences and social sciences were accorded supreme importance in the academic courses and some significant changes were introduced in the teaching media. For ages only Latin was used as the principal media of teaching in institutes of higher education; now German or any other native language gained recognition as the medium of instruction in universities. Not only that, libraries were established inside universities "no longer were the students expected and obliged to confine themselves to lecture notes and a few text books; rather they were expected to look up for themselves the best treatises on the subjects of their studies."

Picture 3: Halle University

<https://www.oldbookillustrations.com/illustrations/halle-university/>

The foundation of the University of Halle stood at a turning point in German and European university history. Whereas in Wittenberg and Leipzig a strong Lutheran influence dominated, at the University of Halle academic freedom was considered to be essential for teaching and research. From the beginning, the four faculties had six

internationally renowned academics: the lawyers Christian Thomasius and Samuel Stryck, the theologist August Hermann Francke, the philosopher Christian Wolff, and the physicians Friedrich Hoffman and Georg Ernst Stahl.

It was also the most prestigious university in central Europe. Following the foundation of the University of Wittenberg in 1530/1531 by Cardinal Albrecht, the University of Halle was founded on 12 July 1694 with a spectacular baroque ceremony. Already in 1680, Michel Milie dit la Fleur, a Huguenot, founded a language school which in 1688 resulted in the so called Ritterschule, and the philosopher Christian Thomasius who was exiled from Leipzig started teaching the nobility from 1690.

4.8 The Pioneering Contribution of Professor Thomasius

By 1734, yet another pioneering institution, Gottingen University of Germany acquired over 200,000 books; one by one many other universities in Germany started to follow Halle and Gottingen, even Leiptzig University—which sacked Professor Thomasius for his unorthodox views- started to accept new ideas and practices. In due course of time, through additions and alterations many new subjects like engineering, technology, etc. became parts of the new curriculum. These revolutionary changes in university education system in Germany transformed the institutes of higher education of that country to a new high. However, in universities of other European countries such changes were not accepted easily; the universities of Italy, Spain and France, though, enjoyed pride and prestige, but they were not as modern as the German universities in their thoughts and outlooks. Without the aggressive stand of Thomasius for changing the traditional format of the curriculum modernization of universities could never have been possible. His opposition was the most important factor behind modernization of the world of academics. The syllabi and the classroom lectures could be free of religious overtones; as a result, universities in Europe and in many other parts of the world had to focus on worldly issues by giving due weightage on natural and social sciences.

Picture 4: Christian Thomasius (born Jan. 1, 1655, Leipzig—died Sept. 23, 1728, Halle, Saxony)

Picture Credit: <https://l450v.alamy.com/450v/xa8cpe/thomasius-christian-111655-2391728-german-jurist-portrait-steel-engraving-19th-century-artists-copyright-has-not-to-be-cleared-xa8cpe.jpg>

Christian Thomasius was thus a German philosopher and progressive educator, who established the academic reputation of the newly founded University of Halle

(1694) as one of the first modern universities. He departed from the traditional Scholastic curriculum of medieval institutions, made philosophy independent of theology, and lectured in vernacular German rather than in the customary Latin, thus influencing Halle to become during the 18th century the leading centre for the new cultural thought in Protestant Germany. He left notable impact on University Revolution.

In a Nutshell, The **university revolution** refers to a transformative period in European academic history, primarily during the 17th and 18th centuries, marked by significant changes in the structure, purpose, and curriculum of higher education institutions. This movement challenged the dominance of medieval scholasticism, which was largely focused on theology and classical texts, and promoted a broader, more human-centered approach to learning. It emphasized critical inquiry, empirical research, and the integration of diverse disciplines such as natural sciences, philosophy, and the emerging social sciences.

Key figures, like **Christian Thomasius**, played crucial roles in this revolution by advocating for practical knowledge, vernacular instruction, and intellectual freedom within university settings. The university revolution laid the foundation for modern academic practices, fostering an environment where questioning established doctrines and exploring new ideas became central to education. This period not only democratized knowledge but also set the stage for the development of disciplines like sociology, which seek to understand and improve human society through systematic study and analysis.

4.9 The contribution of University Revolution to the origin and growth of sociology

In the early 1840's Auguste Comte, the French sociologist, for the first time used the term 'sociology' and this fact is known to all, but what we do not know is that - many years before that, in the 18th century itself, study of social science was quite common in many of Germany's universities. The interest in the study of and research in the new discipline named sociology appeared mainly in the context of university revolution and bold ideas of Christian Thomasius. Therefore, it is no exaggeration that the 'university revolution' of Thomasius in the 17th century Germany had tremendous contribution in the origin and growth of sociology. Comte, no doubt, spoke more intensely about sociology, but Thomasius was the only person in whose thoughts the

whole of the Humanities discipline became a part and parcel of academic curricula; it did not happen ever before in any other thinker's writings. For this very reason, the students of sociology must know about the role and importance of university revolution.

While Auguste Comte is widely celebrated for coining the term "sociology" and laying the foundation for its development as a distinct discipline in the 19th century, the intellectual roots of sociological thought extend far deeper into European academic history. One of the most pivotal yet often overlooked figures in this early history is Christian Thomasius, a German philosopher and jurist whose bold ideas in the 17th century significantly influenced the evolution of social sciences within the academic realm. Understanding Thomasius's contributions and the broader context of the "university revolution" is essential for grasping the true origins of sociology.

Thomasius's influence emerged against the backdrop of a transformative period in German academia. During the 17th century, universities in Germany began to break away from the rigid scholasticism that had dominated medieval education, which primarily focused on theology and classical texts. Thomasius was a central figure in this movement, advocating for a more practical, empirical, and human-centered approach to learning. His reforms emphasized the integration of natural sciences, philosophy, and what we would now recognize as social sciences into the university curriculum. This represented a radical shift, as it broadened the scope of academic inquiry to include the complexities of human behavior, social structures, and moral philosophy.

One of Thomasius's most groundbreaking contributions was his insistence on the application of reason to all areas of human life, including societal issues. He argued for the importance of understanding society through systematic observation and critical analysis—principles that would later become cornerstones of sociological methodology. By positioning the study of human society alongside natural sciences within the university framework, Thomasius laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to understanding social phenomena.

Furthermore, Thomasius's vision of academia was inherently inclusive and progressive. He sought to democratize education by promoting the vernacular language (German) over Latin, thereby making knowledge more accessible to a broader audience. This democratization of knowledge foreshadowed sociology's later commitment to examining social structures and advocating for societal reform. In many ways, Thomasius's educational reforms prefigured the sociological imagination—a concept popularized by C. Wright Mills centuries later—which emphasizes the interplay between individual experiences and broader social forces.

The university revolution in Germany also fostered an environment conducive to the development of new ideas about human society and governance. The seeds of sociological inquiry were planted in a context where scholars were encouraged to question established doctrines and explore new ways of understanding the human condition. This intellectual freedom and spirit of inquiry would eventually culminate in the formal establishment of sociology as a discipline, with Comte articulating many of the ideas that had been percolating within European universities for over a century.

In this light, while Comte's role in shaping modern sociology is indisputable, the contributions of earlier thinkers like Thomasius provide crucial context. The reforms and ideas introduced during the university revolution of the 17th century not only challenged traditional academic paradigms but also set the stage for the interdisciplinary approach that characterizes sociology today. Therefore, students of sociology must appreciate the historical significance of this period, recognizing that the discipline's roots are deeply intertwined with broader transformations in European thought and education. Thomasius's pioneering efforts remind us that sociology's quest to understand and improve society is part of a long intellectual tradition that values critical inquiry, empirical investigation, and the pursuit of social justice.

4.10 Conclusion

In the Middle Ages many universities came up one by one; some of these exist even today, some have no existence at all. The horizon of learning was widening gradually and in that intellectual environment men could no longer remain satisfied with the age old concerns of education; university revolution was the product of that changed environment. University revolution is closely associated with man's urge for challenging the old ideas and looking ahead for something newer, better and more meaningful while acquiring knowledge. This also resonates with the traditional education system of ancient India. To conclude we can say that the university revolution of Europe has left deep impression on the study and research in sociology of the contemporary world.

The university revolution in Europe marked a profound turning point in the history of education, one that transcended mere institutional change and reflected a broader philosophical shift. This revolution was driven by an insatiable human curiosity and a desire to move beyond the rigid boundaries of medieval scholasticism, which had long dominated European intellectual life. It fostered an environment where critical inquiry replaced rote memorization, and where diverse disciplines—ranging from natural

sciences to moral philosophy—began to flourish. This intellectual expansion not only broadened the scope of academic study but also laid the foundation for the modern university system, which emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, empirical research, and interdisciplinary approaches.

In this transformative period, scholars sought to redefine the purpose of education, moving away from theological dogmatism towards a more holistic understanding of human experience. The emphasis shifted from purely abstract theorization to practical, human-centered knowledge that could address the complexities of social life. This paradigm shift resonates deeply with the principles underlying sociology today: a commitment to understanding societal structures, questioning established norms, and striving for social betterment.

Furthermore, this revolution wasn't merely confined to Europe; it echoed globally, finding parallels in the rich educational traditions of other civilizations, such as ancient India. In ancient Indian educational systems, the pursuit of knowledge extended beyond the transmission of sacred texts to include critical reflection on society, ethics, and governance. Just as European universities evolved to foster critical thought and innovation, ancient Indian institutions like Nalanda and Takshashila encouraged holistic learning and moral development. This parallel development highlights a universal human endeavor: the constant quest for deeper understanding and societal progress through education.

In the contemporary world, the legacy of the European university revolution continues to shape the study and research of sociology. Modern sociology's emphasis on empirical investigation, interdisciplinary analysis, and social reform owes much to the intellectual freedom and methodological rigor that emerged during this transformative era. It reminds us that education is not a static enterprise but a dynamic process—one that evolves in response to societal needs and intellectual challenges. By recognizing the deep historical roots of this evolution, today's sociologists can better appreciate the discipline's role not just as an academic field, but as a powerful tool for understanding and improving the human condition.

4.11 Summary

This study explores the transformative journey of European higher education from its medieval origins to its role in shaping modern sociology. It begins by examining medieval learning, characterized by theological dominance and scholastic methods, and highlights how intellectual horizons expanded through contact with Eastern

civilizations in the 11th century. The term “university” is traced back to its Latin roots, with Bologna University exemplifying the rise of structured higher education in Southern Europe.

The narrative then shifts to the broader development of medieval universities across Europe, emphasizing their evolution amidst disruptions like the 14th-century crises and rising student activism. The enduring influence of scholasticism in the 16th century is discussed, followed by the pivotal role of Halle University and the groundbreaking contributions of Professor Christian Thomasius in the 17th century.

Finally, the study underscores how the “university revolution” laid the foundation for modern sociology by fostering critical inquiry and interdisciplinary learning. This historical journey illustrates how educational reforms in medieval Europe continue to shape contemporary sociological thought and academic practices.

4.12 Questions

Short Questions

1. What was the primary focus of medieval learning in Europe?
2. How did the contact with Eastern civilizations influence European thought in the 11th century?
3. Define the term “university” and explain its etymological roots.
4. Which university is considered one of the earliest formal institutions in Europe?
5. What were the main contributions of Bologna University to higher education?

Long Questions

1. Describe the essence of medieval learning and explain how it was shaped by theological dominance and scholasticism.
2. Discuss the significance of the 11th-century encounters with the East. How did these interactions contribute to the intellectual development of Europe?
3. Trace the evolution of the term “university” and explain its early conceptualization. Why was this development important for the future of higher education?
4. Explain the role of Bologna University in the rise of higher education in Southern Europe. What made it a landmark institution in educational history?

4.13 Reference

Suggested Books:

- Haskins, Charles Homer. *The Rise of Universities*. Cornell University Press, 1957.
- Janin, Hunt. *The University in Medieval Life, 1179-1499*. McFarland & Company, 2008.
- Dupré, Louis. *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*. Yale University Press, 2004.
- de Ridder-Symoens, Hilde (ed.). *A History of the University in Europe, Volume 1: Universities in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Additional Readings and Articles

- Clark, William. *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Rüegg, Walter. "Themes in the History of European Universities." *History of Universities*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1992, pp. 1-36.
- Turner, Frank M. "The Idea of a University: A Reexamination." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2000, pp. 411-436.

Online Resources

- **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy** – Entries on key figures like Christian Thomasius and concepts related to Enlightenment education.

NOTE : This unit has been largely enriched by Professor Kumkum Sarkar, Associate Professor in Sociology, NSOU.

Unit 5 □ The Contributions of Montesquieu

Structure

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5.6.1 Answer in Detail

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5.7 Conclusion

5.8 Summary

5.9 Questions

5.10 References

5.1 Learning Objectives

- To learn about the life of Montesquieu and some of his most well-known works.
- To learn about Montesquieu's classification of societies and its significance today.
- To understand the importance of social and physical factors in social organization.
- To understand Montesquieu's idea of liberty and its various connections with other aspects of society and geography.

5.2 Introduction

Montesquieu was born as Charles-Louis de Secondant, Baron de la Brede near Bordeaux in France on 18th January, 1689. His mother, a pious lady, died in 1696. His father was a magistrate much like his other ancestors and he too trained to become a magistrate at the University of Bordeaux. At the age of nineteen in 1708, he began his career as an advocate in the Parliament of Paris. After that he continued further studies in law in Paris between the years 1709 and 1713, in which year his father passed away. Being brought up in Bordeaux, an important international port, gave him a closer look at the various aspects of trading and commerce and also opened him up to a wide variety of outlooks and ideas, which were to influence his theorization later on. He was a prime example of the cosmopolitan European as a result of the vast variety of influences that came on to him. In the year 1715, he married Jeanne Lartigue. In 1716, with the death of his uncle, he took the title Montesquieu from his uncle and became the President a Mortier of the court of Bordeaux, was elected to the Bordeaux Academy and also to the AcademieFrancaisesometime later. It was from 1721 that he began to receive fame in the circle of academicians and intelligentsia, although anonymously, when he published the *Les LettresPersanes* in Holland at the age of thirty-two. In 1726, he retired from his life as a lawyer and began to travel extensively around Europe. It was during these years of travelling that he started writing some of his most well-known works, especially *The Spirit of the Laws* which he published, once again anonymously, in 1748 after working on it for thirteen years. This book was in fact placed on the Catholic Church's Index of Forbidden Books in 1752. On 10th February, 1755, at the age of sixty-six, Montesquieu breathed his last in Paris.

Do You Know?

When Montesquieu was born, a beggar was brought in to his home and made his godfather so that he would grow up always remembering the poor and disadvantaged.

Montesquieu, being cosmopolitan, was an advocate of constitutionalism, civil rights, the abolition of slavery, social equality and individual liberty, socio-economic progress ensuring the preservation and protection of local traditions, etc. He believed in the importance of justice and the rule of law in ensuring and preserving justice and also in a balance of powers and division of power and authority as an obstruction to the

growth of despotic rulers and governments, among other things. His major works were created as a result of two important events and associated experiences. One was the demise of Louis XIV which suddenly lifted the air of despotism and led to a spurt of freedom and a sudden liberal and open society in France, even though it was a limited liberation and openness. The other experience that shaped Montesquieu's thoughts was his extensive travels, specifically to England, which sowed in him the seeds of a comparison between his own French society and the English society. He realized that societies all over the world were different due to differing climates, religions, laws, governments, cultures, traditions, etc. He therefore set out to find out the laws that governed the process of social change. Societies develop naturally and are not artificially created by man, which is why the laws governing each society should be different, keeping in mind best fit as per the nature and characteristics of each particular society. It became his endeavour to study these laws of social and historical development as expressed through social facts. He tried to study particularistic social facts and from there move to the more general laws that govern entire societies. Thus, as Zeitlin (1968) points out correctly, by trying to arrive at general laws or general forms of action and behaviour, Montesquieu is the first social theorist to have used the concept of *ideal types* even though he did not name it such. In all his works he has used types to study the general patterns and laws of society in more or less numbers, with the maximum usage of such ideal types in probably his most well-known work, *The Spirit of the Laws*.

5.2.1 Major Works

Montesquieu's first work that shot him to fame was *Persian Letters* as already mentioned. In this book, he viewed the French society and social life from a Persian outsider's Orientalist point of view using a comparative methodology. He viewed his own society, its customs, mores, traditions, etc. from a Persian protagonist's view point to show them in a new light. He aimed to show the relativity and varieties in human social institutions through such an approach. He might be criticized here by saying that his Persians were more European than real Persian like in their nature since he did not have a good idea about Persian life and society except for what he had only read (Bottomore and Nisbet 1978). Criticisms notwithstanding, this book did signify a novel way of looking at the French society and its various customs and traditions such as 'the manners and morals of the French...the powers of a magician named Pope, who persuades his followers that bread and wine can be turned into flesh and blood...pained astonishment at the horrors of the Inquisition; and argue indirectly for religious toleration...' (ibid. 8-9). In this book, Montesquieu also wrote about the

family being a positive social institution that is formed without entering into any contracts between people. However, he had negative views about marriage since divorce was not made a possibility in that society, about monogamy and polygamy and incestuous relationship is of no consequence to him. In fact, to him the chance to commit suicide is a *right* that every individual should have and this goes to show that he had a melancholic attitude towards life (ibid).

In the book *Considerations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence* published in 1734, he traced the rise, development and fall of the Roman Empire and tried to philosophise on history. According to him, the primary reason for the decline of the Roman Empire was that an empire that was that big in size was being ruled from only one central location with the provinces thereby becoming weaker with time since they could not be adequately looked after from very far away. He did not give too much importance to the individual and his behaviour or actions as a reason for the demise of the Empire and neither did he think the Deity or supernatural, godly powers were probably causes for it. Montesquieu gave maximum importance to what he called 'general movement' (ibid. 9). Thus, he tried to look for general causes of the decline rather than any specific ones, thus making the study of this phenomenon not only historical but also sociological. As Zeitlin (1968) explains, 'Roman institutions are treated as functionally interdependent and interrelated elements of a common system. Rome's victories and conquests are explained as the effects of specific social and political conditions. Her success, which required changes in the political structure, led inevitably to decline and, finally, to collapse. The final collapse is viewed as a consequence of the initial success which so transformed the whole structure of society as to destroy the very conditions which made for success' (14-15). Bottomore and Nisbet (1978) say that in these above mentioned works, Montesquieu was more interested in the society as a whole than in the particular governments of these societies, their workings and reasons for any failures.

Do You Know

Montesquieu published his works anonymously in order to escape censorship from the French clergy.

His book *The Spirit of the Laws* was a result of work worth twenty years. He often abandoned his work on this book and took it up again over a course of twenty years to finally finish it in 1748 (with an English translation published in 1750). It was a pioneering treatise on political theory and comparative law although it covered a wide range of topics such as social life, anthropology, etc. This work was subtitled as *On*

the Relations Which Must Exist between the Laws and the Constitution of Each Government, the Manners, Climate, Religion, Commerce, etc. and, in the words of Bottomore and Nisbet (1978), a ‘more sociological concern can hardly be imagined’ (10). In this book, Montesquieu classifies political systems into three main kinds – republic, monarchy and despotism. To Montesquieu, the term spirit ‘refers to the distinctive character of a system of laws. The way these are related to one another and to other aspects of a people’s life distinguishes one society from another’ (Zeitlin 1968: 15). This spirit of the laws, or as Bottomore and Nisbet (ibid.) call it, the culture of a society are dependent greatly upon the geographical and climatic conditions of the place where the people reside. Climate determines one’s outlook to life and the general temperament and that in turn determines how customs, traditions and even laws and forms of government are chosen by the people of that society. Since this work was his most influential and important one in the field of sociology, we will focus mainly upon this work in the following sections.

5.3 The Classification of Societies

According to Montesquieu, societies can be classified into three main types – republics including aristocracies and democracies, monarchies and despotic societies. As Zeitlin (1968) points out, Montesquieu’s treatment of this classification is different from that of Voltaire’s since for Voltaire these classifications only applied in the political realm but for Montesquieu they were forms into which entire societies could be classified. These ideal types were in fact created by Montesquieu on the basis of actual observation rather than derived from some already existing theory. He compared historical and travelers’ accounts, himself travelled and studied a large number of societies to finally arrive at his ideal types of societies. His endeavor has been to show that political systems are intricately related with other institutions or systems found in a society. Let us now look into his classification and the guiding principles behind each type of society.

5.3.1 Republic

For Montesquieu, the best examples of a republican society are the city-states like Athens and Rome. Republican forms of government are ideal for societies that have smaller populations and any increase in the number of people breaks down the republican political system. The basis of this form of society is the principle of equality. This is especially true of democratic republics. All citizens are treated as the same and there is thus a homogeneity in this type of societies leading to order.

In a democracy, which is apparently the perfect form of republican society according to Montesquieu, the main emphasis is the common welfare of all citizens. Thus, a democratic republic is 'relatively small, equalitarian, and homogenous and is characterized by solidarity' (Zeitlin 1968:18). A democratic society may be ruled by ministers or senators but these ministers or senators must be chosen by the common people of the society. Thus, in democratic societies the sovereign power lies with the common masses.

However, a democratic republic will meet its downfall due to two reasons – inequality or extreme equality. There are strict rules against personal accumulation of wealth and power in an excessive amount because it is feared that excessive personal wealth will undermine the foundations of solidarity and unity in a republic by creating inequalities. Citizens will no longer identify their interests with the general interests of the country as a whole and therefore will begin to cater to personal interests, thus creating cleavages in the solidarity of the society. On the other hand, when citizens are no longer content being equal only as citizens of the nation (who might have different amounts of wealth and power) and want equality in every respect, then too the solidarity of the democracy will be undermined.

Another form of republican society is the aristocratic society. In this type of society and government, the sovereign power lies with only a section of the society who govern the rest of the people. The laws in such a society must prevent the abuse of power by the aristocratic nobles; they must ensure that there is as little difference as possible between the nobility and the general public; and the laws must also ensure equality amongst the nobility themselves. If laws are created keeping these three principles in mind, then the aristocratic republic will be able to achieve moderation and prevent corruption. If not, the aristocratic form of society will meet its downfall due to corruption.

Underlying Principle: The guiding principle or spirit behind republican societies is *virtue*. In a democratic republic, the principle of virtue signifies the love of the law and a dedication to the group that one belongs to. Thus, in a democracy, the people are patriots who live by and for the group and the virtue is a civic virtue. They believe in equality, frugal living and dedicating themselves to the interests of the general whole rather than try to cater to simply personal interests. In an aristocracy, the principle of virtue is seen in the idea of moderation. Since the power lies with a few in an aristocratic government, therefore the laws must be created in such a way that the underlying principle of moderation that characterizes the aristocratic form of the republican government is not harmed.

Thus, the republican society is a more equalitarian society overall, no matter if power is concentrated in the hands of the general citizens or only a section of the whole population. Virtue is the necessary spirit behind the laws of a republic and it is not necessary that all members at all times will be virtuous. As long as the majority are, the society will exist. Montesquieu is also sure to mention that not all republics are always virtuous but only ought to be so.

5.3.2 Monarchy

The monarchical form of government is commonly found in societies with a medium sized population. In a monarchical form of government and society, there is one person who governs the rest via fixed and already established laws. There are certain channels present in such societies through which the power of the monarch flows such as the parliament, the nobility, the clergy, etc. Since the basis of a monarchical society is not equality, therefore it is not unusual that social classes emerge in monarchical societies. There are a variety of specialized tasks that emerge such as farming, trade and commerce and industries and therefore a complex division of labour emerges in such societies. As a result, monarchies are characterized by a complex social stratification system which reaches its heights under this form of government. These social classes check and limit each other's powers and also that of the monarch. As a result, for Montesquieu, these societies offer greater political freedom of the people compared to even the democratic form of government. The classes make sure that none become too powerful and they are all able to pursue their own interests to a certain degree. Therefore, the social structure of monarchical governments is rather complex compared to the social structure of a republican society. Since there are a variety of classes to be found in monarchies with 'varying degrees of wealth, power, and prestige, personal interest, envy, rivalry, and class interest as well emerge as strong forces' (Zeitlin 1968: 18-19). Thus, individuals in these societies tend to pursue their own interests and/or the interests of only their class over those of the general society as is common for republican societies. The monarchical form of society is a good expression of the utilitarian mode of life. Since there is a tendency for class-based or even individual rivalry to emerge amongst people owing to differences in wealth, power and prestige, therefore they all try to perform their own functions as well as possible so that their interests are met. If this is done by all groups, classes and individuals, then the society as a whole will prosper.

Underlying Principle: In a monarchy, the guiding principle or the spirit of the laws is *honour* or the significance attached to each rank or class as seen through the privileges that are accorded to them. These privileges are more for some and less for

some others. Those who demand such privileges from the monarch and are granted them become autonomous and privileged classes between the monarch and the general masses. An example would be the class of nobles. For Montesquieu, the intermediate class of nobility is essential for the survival of the monarchical form of government since they are the channels through which the monarch expresses his power over the masses. There is a give and take relationship between the monarch and the noble based on the virtue of honour for each class. Personal ambition as well as a sense of honour work hand in hand in monarchical governments. If the give and take relationship between the monarchy and the nobility breaks down, the monarchy will spiral into a despotic government. The monarchical form of government can break down either if the monarch destroys the intermediate classes such as the nobility, or the monarch rules arbitrarily without following the laws of the land, or if the monarch abuses his power and dishonours the citizens of the country.

Thus, in a monarchy, there are greater divisions among the members of the society based on various grounds like wealth, power and prestige but even then there is greater degree of freedom that people have to pursue their own well-being. The monarchy is held together by the nobility who form links between the people and the monarch. The spirit of the monarchical society, honour, is seen by Montesquieu from two perspectives. Compared to the principle of virtue found in republics, honour has less value. However, in comparison with the guiding principle or spirit of a despotic society, honour is positively measured as it can act as a shield against the despotic state.

5.3.3 Despotism

The despotic state emerges when other systems of government fail, mainly as a result of corruption. It is a form of government where there is only one person on whose whims and wishes the society is ruled. There are no laws that can control the wishes of the despot. For Montesquieu, the despotic government is found in its perfect form in the Orient. There can be two reasons for the growth of a despotic government – one, ‘all orders of the society have become so weakened that they can offer no organized resistance to the despot’, or two, ‘the regime becomes a “democracy” in which all but the ruler are equal in their condition of servitude’ (Zeitlin 1968: 19). In a despotic state, people need not be educated lest they learn about their rights and fight against the despot. Since property is not securely held by anyone in a despotic state, despotic societies do not have flourishing economies.

Underlying Principle: The spirit of the laws in a despotic society is that of *fear*. Fear, a basic, sub-political emotion is used by the ruler in a despotic state to control its

people. Since it is based on the principle of fear there are no intermediaries between the ruler and the people in a despotic state unlike in monarchies. The only mediating force in such a society is religion. There is a constant fear of punishment amongst the general members of the society and with time the punishments would tend to get more and more severe. The despot, being all powerful, creates such an education system that creates timid and fearful subjects. These subjects can only respond to the threat of violence and punishment rather than to reason. Thus, a despotic state is a state in decay since it is based on the fear rather than the welfare of its subjects.

While these three are the main types of societies that we are interested in, Montesquieu also gave a fourth type of society that exists – the primitive society divided into societies of savages who are hunters and barbarians who raise cattle. These societies are small in size, share property, are governed by traditions and customs rather than by laws and the community elders are the heads of these societies.

The classification of societies done by Montesquieu centuries ago still stands relevant because it is a classification based on the idea that any growth or change in the structure of one system will lead to changes in the structure of another. Social solidarity finds different bases in the different types of societies. For example, while homogeneity was the basis of social solidarity in republics, in modern societies it is division of labour based on skills that is a source of solidarity.

5.4 Check your Progress

5.4.1 Answer in Detail

1. Based on your understanding of Montesquieu's classification of societies, differentiate between the various forms of societies.
2. Write a note on the major works undertaken by Montesquieu.

5.4.2 Answer Briefly

1. What are the spirits of the laws in various forms of societies as classified by Montesquieu.
2. Show how Montesquieu used the comparative method when studying societies.

5.5 Montesquieu's Political Sociology

The Spirit of the Laws has had an especially significant contribution to the area of political sociology. Even though for the most part the treatise deals with the influence of geography and climate, yet Montesquieu showed that it was these factors that affected the culture of the people in a particular place or the spirit of the laws. Montesquieu wanted to 'relate climate to temperament and temperament, in turn, to customs, laws, and forms of government' (Bottomore and Nisbet 1978: 10). Thus, the geography and climate of a place influences the people of those places to create certain cultural forms and these cultural forms produce the spirit of the people in turn. These factors together influence the people of a particular society to bend more towards certain forms of social and political institutions and away from other forms. Apart from physical or geographical factors, there are also some social factors that are of importance in determining manners, laws, customs of a society. The social factors include such institutions as religion, trade, currency, population and laws. In the following lines we will go through briefly this theory of Montesquieu.

According to Montesquieu, people living in cold climates are more vigorous and stronger. This leads to greater frankness and lesser suspiciousness and cunning among the people living in such climates. They are also less sensitive to pleasures compared to the people living in temperate or, especially, tropical climates. The people living in colder climates therefore are not prone to despotism and therefore European countries do not have despotic forms of governments which is common in the Eastern parts of the world where the climate is warmer. Since climates are dependent upon high and low latitudes, therefore temperaments of people are also high or low depending upon the latitudes. Therefore, the people in lower latitudes are more exuberant in nature compared to those in colder places in higher latitudes. In the northern part of the world, where the climate is colder, the people are more virtuous and those in the southern part of the world where the weather is warmer have many vices in their personalities. As Bottomore and Nisbet (1978) explained after Montesquieu, in hotter climates, 'the body is deprived of vigor and strength and this may in turn account for the immutability of manners and customs over long periods of time' (11). Even agriculture, the prime occupation of human beings for the longest time in history, is not done with vigour by people in warmer climates since the climatic conditions make the people there more prone to 'speculation than to action' (ibid.). People's choices regarding the use of alcohol are also determined by the climatic conditions. Countries

where the climatic conditions are hot often have laws specifying that they cannot drink alcohol. In fact, as Montesquieu pointed out, in countries like Arabia where the climate is hot, water used to be the usual drink that people would have for the longest time. On the contrary, in cold countries the people are in a way forced to take alcoholic drinks due to the weather and therefore there have never been any laws against it in such countries unlike in the warmer climates. Montesquieu was even of the opinion that slavery has a link with climatic conditions too. In hot climates since people are less vigorous and strong therefore they supposedly require chastisement to get the work done and this is why slaves were beaten by their masters. While slaves are lazy towards their masters, so are the masters towards their people and therefore slavery has a political angle to it. However, later on he doubts the naturalness of the institution of slavery and says that all men are born equal, giving the example of Europe to say that even if climatic conditions do make slavery necessary or even natural, it can be abolished as it happened in Europe. Bottomore and Nisbet (1978) quote Montesquieu to say that the laws were made poorly in the first place which made the people lazy and then these lazy men were chastised and reduced to slaves due to their laziness. However, it must be mentioned here that he has also judged the slavery of Negroes as natural. Not just daily habits but even the relations between the sexes are determined by climatic conditions in Montesquieu's view. In hot climates, women supposedly mature faster and therefore they are ready for marriage by the age of eight or nine and begin to experience old age from the age of twenty. He posits this as the reason by the practice of polygamous marriage in Asian countries – since women mature and age far too quickly in hotter climates therefore men are prone to look for other, younger wives when their existing wives hover around what is considered as old age. On the contrary, in colder climates women mature and age slower and therefore their husbands do not need to look for other wives. As a result, the colder European countries practice monogamous marriage. He then goes on to say that this influence of climate on the relations between men and women has influenced where which religion was established and the way religious rules regarding marriage have been codified. He says that it is because women age more quickly in hotter climates which are typically common in the central or Eastern part of the world that Islam was able to make rules regarding one man marrying multiple women. Since in colder climates there is no need or justification for a man marrying many women as women do not age quick in cold climate therefore Islam could not strike a root in the colder countries like the European countries. It was Christianity with its rules of virginity, monogamy, the necessary presence of women in the place of worship and everyone's

equal and necessary communication with God that was better suited to the climate and consequent temperament of the people of European countries.

However, it was not just temperature that was of consequence in the way social and religious laws and customs were designed. Montesquieu gave due importance to other geographical factors like soil, distance of the land from the sea, the availability of water, the presence of natural harbours, the distribution of landmasses and water bodies, etc. Those who live in areas where the soil is barren they are more industrious, hardworking, courageous and therefore fit for war. The countries where the soil is fertile will be more prone to conquests since the desire to cultivate on fertile land is in all men. Therefore people living in countries that have fertile land are more prone to subjection, servitude and dependence. Democratic governments would be more common in countries where the soil is barren and aristocratic governments are more common in places where the soil is fertile. In talking about the nature of people living in island societies, Montesquieu said that such people value freedom and liberty more than those living on the mainland societies. Being surrounded by the seas, island societies cannot be conquered very easily and therefore they are able to preserve their own laws and customs and be free from tyranny.

He did not only talk about the importance of geographic factors in discussing the spirit of mankind but he gave enough attention to factors like religion, laws, morals, customs, etc. For example, in talking about religion, he said that in countries where the government is of a moderate type, Christianity would be established easily. However, countries with despotic governments will have the Mohammedan religion. In despotic societies, religion will have probably have a more important influence than in democratic societies. Montesquieu said that religious doctrines need to be in tune with the general spirit of the society which is determined by the geography and history of the society. If the religious doctrines are not in tune with the spirit of the society then there will be adverse effects of it. Religion, however, for Montesquieu, was the only thing that would check the despot's move to gain greater power. Moreover, he gives great importance to trade and commerce in sustainable economic growth of a nation. Commerce can lead to the destruction of prejudices and help in the growth of peace among nations as it can improve manners among the people. The spirit of commerce helps in the growth of feelings of frugality, laboriousness, tranquility, order, peace, etc. In monarchical governments, the aim of trade and commerce is to supply luxury items. In despotic governments there is hardly any trade possible since the notion of secured private property does not exist. In republican governments, the aim of trade and commerce is to gain little but continuously through trade with other countries.

Trade and commerce are typically free of the control of any government according to Montesquieu. Free international trade will help in the proper development of a society as per Montesquieu's views. Apart from these, he talks about the importance of the right size of the population. Population, i.e., manpower, is a very important resource for a society and too small a population would signify a lack of manpower while too big of a population will lead to great pressure on the resources of a society. The optimal level of population is that which is covered by the productive capacity of the society. In fact, he talked about incentivizing the peasants to increase productivity by creating in them a desire for luxuries and these luxuries would be created by the artisans. This is thus a way in which the various forms of economic activities would be encouraged and kept alive.

Thus, for Montesquieu, social and cultural change were a result of diverse factors that included not just changes in laws, customs, ways of trade etc. but also the climatic and geographic factors. However, he was also of the opinion that as civilizations mature the influence of climate begins to dwindle but at the beginning stages of human civilization it is the climate of the region that is of greatest importance in determining laws, customs, morals, traditions, i.e., the general spirit of mankind.

5.5.1 The Separation of Powers

The whole idea of the separation of powers of a government between the legislative, executive and judicial bodies was to ensure the greatest amount of liberty possible to its citizens. Montesquieu made a distinction between liberty and freedom. Liberty is not the freedom to do anything that one pleases. If there was absolute freedom then there would be a threat to security in a society. Liberty is a state of living a free life under the aegis of the laws of the land and being protected from atrocities of state power provided we live by those laws. To prevent the misuse or abuse of power vested in one person, there must therefore be a separation of powers. The judicial, executive and legislative bodies of a government each has its own powers and acts as checks on the misuse of power by each. This prevents the formation of a tyrannical government. As Lazarski (2013) pointed out, liberty is not about the form of government but is determined by the moderation of the government. As such, liberty is possible even in monarchies if they are more moderate than republican forms of government. Liberty is a condition in which the laws are related to protection from threats to order and security in a society thereby leaving the citizens to pursue other goals and interests. Thus, for Montesquieu, the laws of the state should not be related to the practice of religions since God does not require any sort of protection. Laws should be made in such a manner so as to make it easy for

citizens to protect themselves from state punishment if they have not committed any crimes, thereby providing liberty to the citizens. The laws should be clear to the citizens, they should make room for inadvertent actions and not turn them into crimes and should also allow citizens to prove their innocence. The laws should be based on a person's conduct that is possible to be proven rather than his or her thoughts and feelings. Thus, underlying his entire gamut of thought on criminal laws was the idea of liberty. He was in fact fearful that liberty would be undermined as societies would almost inevitably go from republic to monarchy to despotism where liberty would be most undermined. He believed that as technology progressed, the army would become more and more powerful citing the example of the use of gunpowder and its effects and went on to say that societies would become more and more despotic with the rise of technology. Conquest of one society or kingdom by another would also lead to the undermining or loss of liberty in the conquered society. For Montesquieu, even the differential levels of liberty in different parts of the world is a result of climatic conditions. In harsher climates, according to him, men need to be too hardworking to survive and were also believers of liberty. He also pointed to the societies situated along seas and oceans to say that that was where trade would flourish and would also lead to the greatest amount of liberty bestowed upon the people. He believed that countries with the least amount of resources would also respect the liberty of its citizens. In contrast, countries that were rich and had abundant natural resources would be the locations of the greatest hierarchies among its citizens due to the differential distribution of the resources and that would lead to greater liberty for those at the top of the hierarchy and lesser for those at the bottom.

The idea behind the doctrine of the separation of powers, for Montesquieu, was that no one person or group should become all-powerful as that would be dangerous for the citizens of that country. The separation of powers, as already emphasized before, was meant to protect the liberty of the citizens of a nation. Montesquieu might be criticized, however, on his simplistic notion of the preservation of liberty since the separation of powers alone between different bodies of the government would not ensure liberty and a variety of other factors are also at play, some of which he probably himself alluded to in bringing together the amount of liberty and the climatic conditions that prevail in a country.

5.6 Check your Progress

5.6.1 Answer in Detail

1. Explain the effects of physical factors on the development of law, customs, etc. in a society.
2. What are the social factors that play a role in the development of the general spirit of mankind? Explain the influence of those factors.
3. What was Montesquieu's doctrine on liberty?

5.6.2 Answer Briefly

1. Explain the link between separation of powers and liberty.
2. Apart from climate, what other geographical factors were important in determining the spirit of the people living in a society for Montesquieu?
3. How does the spirit of the of mankind in despotic societies differ from that of more open societies based on social factors?

5.7 Conclusion

Montesquieu was a pioneer. He might be considered to be the first philosopher to use the comparative method in his study of societies which is widely used in sociological researches now. The Spirit of the Laws is an excellent piece of work that develops most profoundly his comparative historical method. Based on his comparisons of various forms of society, he gave a very clear idea of the social structure of different types of societies based on a variety of factors such as climate, soil, religion, customs, etc. which determine the general spirit of the people in every society. As Baum (1979) points out, the thesis that Montesquieu gave regarding the suitability of particular religions to particular places was a good example of an *empirical* comparative work based on value-free methods of analysis and comparison. He also philosophized in terms of ideal-types, a concept used by Weber much later. The Spirit of the Laws is a volume that deals in greatest details with the ideal types of forms of governments and societies.

5.8 Summary

Montesquieu said that the differences in geographical conditions as well as those related to social, cultural, judicial, etc. institutions lead to specific kinds of societies for each such type and they are unique to those very societies. If any institution was to be supplanted from the society where it was born naturally to another where the conditions are different, there will definitely arise friction and will lead to an imbalance in the general overall social structure. As such, Montesquieu was implying that any change in the systems and institutions in a society would bring about its downfall and this means that he had a negative view about change and progress. Baum (1979) writes that Montesquieu's 'notion of progress was a limited one which contained the utopian assumption that an ultimate stage may well be reached beyond which weaknesses begin to creep in. It is rather the lack of a sense of dialectical evolution than a lack of a sense of progress which hinders Montesquieu's purpose' (94). He goes on to write 'Montesquieu in his treatment of social structure emerges as a figure unique among his contemporaries. His conception of social order was new to the Age of Reason and sets him apart from his contemporaries, and allies him more closely with the structural functionalists of the 19th and 20th centuries' (ibid. 95). Not only in the discipline of political science but even in the field of sociology Montesquieu's contributions remain indelible.

5.9 Questions

Short Questions:

1. What was Montesquieu's first work that gained him fame?
2. How did Montesquieu view French society in *Persian Letters*?
3. What were Montesquieu's views on marriage and family in *Persian Letters*?
4. What reason did Montesquieu attribute to the fall of the Roman Empire in *Considerations*?
5. How did Montesquieu classify political systems in *The Spirit of the Laws*?
6. How does Montesquieu link climate with the temperament of a people?
7. What role does geography play in Montesquieu's understanding of political systems?
8. How does Montesquieu explain the practice of polygamy in warmer climates?

9. What is Montesquieu's justification for the existence of slavery in certain regions?
10. How does the separation of powers protect liberty according to Montesquieu?
11. What is the relationship between commerce and the spirit of a society, according to Montesquieu?
12. How does Montesquieu differentiate liberty from freedom?
13. What does Montesquieu suggest about the influence of religious doctrines on political systems?
14. According to Montesquieu, how does the fertility of the land influence political structures?
15. Why does Montesquieu believe that island societies value liberty more than mainland societies?

Long Questions:

1. Discuss how Montesquieu's comparative methodology in *Persian Letters* challenged the customs and traditions of French society.
2. Explain Montesquieu's views on the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, focusing on his concept of 'general movement' ?
3. How does Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* analyse the relationship between laws and the geographical and climatic conditions of societies?
4. Compare Montesquieu's classification of republics, monarchies, and despotic societies, focusing on their underlying principles.
5. How does Montesquieu's concept of social solidarity differ between republican, monarchical, and despotic societies?
6. How does Montesquieu relate geography and climate to the formation of cultural norms and political systems in his *The Spirit of the Laws*? Discuss with examples of how he contrasts societies in colder and warmer climates.
7. Explain Montesquieu's views on the connection between climatic conditions and the institution of slavery. How does he justify slavery in certain climates, and what are his views on the abolition of slavery in Europe?
8. In what ways does Montesquieu connect the climate of a region to the social and religious customs, particularly marriage and the role of women? Provide examples from both colder European societies and warmer Asian societies.
9. Discuss Montesquieu's theory on the relationship between trade and commerce and the political stability of a society. How does he differentiate the role of trade in monarchies, republics, and despotic governments?

10. Montesquieu emphasizes the importance of the separation of powers in preserving liberty. How does he define liberty, and what mechanisms does he propose to protect it? What are the potential limitations of his approach?
11. How does Montesquieu view the role of religion in different forms of government, especially in relation to liberty and despotism? How do religious doctrines align with the “spirit of the society” in his view?
12. Explore Montesquieu’s assertion that the distribution of resources influences political hierarchies and liberty. How does the abundance or scarcity of resources shape political power and freedoms in a society?
13. Montesquieu believed that the advancement of technology would lead to increased despotism. Analyze his concerns regarding military advancements, such as the use of gunpowder, and their impact on liberty.

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Unit 6 □ The Contributions of Saint Simon

Structure

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6.1 Learning Objectives

- To learn about the biographical history and social circumstances in which Saint-Simon found himself that influenced his philosophy.
- To learn about the stages of the progress of history, society and science.
- To know the image of the ideal society that Saint-Simon envisioned.
- To learn about Saint-Simon's views on social class divisions.

6.2 Introduction

Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon, usually referred to as Henri de Saint-Simon or simply St. Simon, was born in Paris in an aristocratic family on 17th October, 1760. He lived at a time when France was going through numerous political upheavals such as the setting up of oligarchic Directories in 1795, the military dictatorship of Napoleon in 1799 and, in 1814, the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy.

These upheavals of the French Revolution (1787-1799) had a major impact on the social, economic and religious conditions of the then French society and these changes and conflicts had a decisive impact on St. Simon's thoughts and approaches to society and social problems. At the age of seventeen he was sent to America to help the American colonies in their war of independence from the English colonizers. By 1790, St. Simon was completely dedicated to writing on political and philosophical matters and later on took on Auguste Comte as his collaborator and secretary who later on became the founding father of the discipline called Sociology. Later on, he turned to the study of science and attended courses at Ecole Polytechnique and even proposed making scientists the priests of society in his 'Letters of an Inhabitant of Geneva to his Contemporaries' published in 1803. Some of his other noted publications are 'Nouveau Christianisme' (1825), 'On the Reorganization of European Society' (1814) and 'Industry' (1816-18), a collaborative work with Auguste Comte. He was one of the pioneers of the subject of sociology, among other disciplines, without ever having written a single piece of enduring academic work. His works, in the form of brochures and letters for the most part, have been criticized as lacking clarity and coherence yet his ideas have had an undeniably important influence on social sciences. By the end of his life, St. Simon had become financially dependent on the aid of friends and well-wishers and even tried to take his life once in 1823 in a fit of frustration and despondency. Ultimately, he died on 19th May, 1825 in Paris, the city of his birth.

Being born in the pre-Revolutionary French society, he was deeply influenced by the Enlightenment ideas. Three important factors shaped his theoretical formulations – the rise of scientific naturalism and rationalist thought of Condorcet coupled with a philanthropic urge to reform the world he was living in; the rise of the bourgeoisie that created a material base for the new society to be built upon; and the search for principles that might lead to the establishment of unity in the new society and this led him to the works of theorists like Louis de Bonald, Joseph de Maistre and Edmund Burke. St. Simon's works are mainly in the areas of the transformation of society from feudal to industrial and its effects for social organization, the advocacy of a rational, empirical science of society and an organismic theory of social evolution. As Swingewood (1984) writes, the works of St. Simon represent theories related to the budding separation of state bodies and the civil society, where the bureaucratic institutions are considered to be hostile towards the needs of the new social classes that are being formed as a result of industrialization. While he admired the unity of medieval society, the cause of which he attributed mainly to religion, he also realized that there was no going back to that order. He believed that all societies were held

together by certain forces and in the feudal order it was the militaristic force that was holding the society together. He identified that with the coming of the new social order there were new forces that were coming into being – the rise of positivistic science; the rise of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie; Enlightenment values of liberty, equality and natural rights; the rise of the Protestant Reformation; and a general decline in the importance of religious forces. With the old feudal order torn down and the new order not yet in place, there was chaos in society. It is this chaos that he tried to understand and theorize upon with his knowledge of scientific positivism, rationality, the influence of bourgeoisie, etc. His works influenced a number of social scientists including Auguste Comte, the founding father of Sociology, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and others.

Did You Know?

St. Simon did not receive formal education. He was mostly self-taught except for a few private tutors.

6.3 Stages of History

Just as Hegel viewed the development of reason as the factor that led to the development of societies from primitive to modern, for St. Simon it was the development of scientific reason that would lead societies to traverse through various stages and ultimately reach the positivist stage. There is an ebb and flow of development in each society. As societies come into existence, they are on an ascending path to maturity and when they reach maturity each society is going to begin its declining path. St. Simon showed that the feudal society was on its path to maturity till about the tenth century, after which this form of social system began to witness its own downfall resulting in the Revolution in the end in about the eighteenth century. The industrial and scientific forces which had developed during the period of decline of the old order began to undermine the authoritarian forces of that order such as the priests and nobles and ultimately led to their downfall and themselves became the new elite and forces of authority. The old order, as Durkheim described, was based on an aggressive and warlike attitude towards its people and imposed its own beliefs on the people without allowing any space for questioning. The new order that emerged out of industrialism is one that is essentially pacifist and is based on reason and rationality, the hallmarks of science. Therefore, there is a contradiction between these two types of society and it is through this contradiction and the resultant chaos and crisis that

the French Revolution ultimately took shape. We see that Saint-Simon even anticipated in a way Karl Marx's theory of class conflict and revolution.

While studying the stages through which society has evolved, he studied how knowledge and ideas began to change. The emphasis on religious knowledge gave way to a progressive, scientific knowledge base and various branches of science emerged with time. Scientific knowledge began with the development of astronomy and proceeded towards greater refinement and scope through physics, chemistry and biology and ultimately reached the point where it could study the social world in the modern era. Once science was able to study nature in its entirety, it was only a matter of time until it began to develop human sciences and the method used to study the human sciences would be the same as the ones of the natural sciences, i.e., the positive method.

In theorizing on the stages of history, Saint-Simon pointed out three distinct phases through which a society went – *polytheistic* (primitive stage); *theological* (feudal stage); *positive* (modern stage characterized by science, technology and industry). The Western society of his time was inching closer to the positivist stage as a result of the upheavals of the French Revolution. According to him, the medieval society was the ideal unified society that corresponded with the theological stage of history but he believed that it was futile to try to go back to the theological or polytheistic stages due to the changes brought about by the French and Industrial Revolutions. In this new society, it was science that was to become the unifying factor rather than religion. The government of this new society would be less powerful in terms of commanding its men; rather, the government would play the role of ensuring that all the useful work for the progress and development of society is not hindered. In a work titled *Reorganization of European Society* published in 1814, Saint-Simon went into a detailed discussion about the nature and role of future political organizations. In the medieval society, it was the Church that carried out the task of ensuring order and stability in the society and was international in its ambit. In the modern society characterized by science and industry, the Church can no longer play the role that it used to but there is a definite need for another international organization that would use scientific and positivist principles to maintain social order and stability.

This view of history as well as scientific knowledge moving in stages from primitive to modern, from polytheistic to positivist and that the Church would be replaced by science as the unifying force in society show that Comte's ideas about the nature and development of social sciences in general and sociology in particular are all derived from Saint-Simon and therefore it might be considered that it was Saint-

Simon rather than Comte who was the founder of the discipline of sociology, if not in name at least in spirit.

6.4 Image of Ideal Society

St. Simon had a positivist image of the new social order that was emerging with the downfall of the feudal order. The study of human conduct, or what St. Simon called *social physiology*, must be done with the help of a positivist approach which would be more scientific just as the physical or natural phenomena are studied with a scientific approach. He hoped that the social sciences would be as efficient, unified and elegant as the natural sciences were in studying what was around them. Even though eventually St. Simon gave up his idea of unifying the sciences, yet 'he held on to his conception of science as a body of verified and established beliefs which could take the place of religion as the binding force of society. Religion, whose essential function has been to provide a coherent view of the universe and of human existence, and thus to unite people on the basis of common truths, would now be replaced by science' (Zeitlin 1968: 59). Thus, rather than religious teachings, it would be scientific knowledge that would be of greatest importance in the positivistic society. In such a society, instead of the religious leaders and clergy being powerful, it would be the scientists, industrialists and all those dealing with scientific knowledge who would be most powerful. Thus, there would be a difference between those who were educated and understood and followed the scientific principles in their lives and those who were unable to understand the scientific principles and would continue to gain knowledge and understanding of the world around them through the means of religious rituals and mysticism. St. Simon called these educated people who were able to grasp knowledge directly from their surroundings the *natural elites*. This new social order of a futuristic society where the educated would become the elites and people of power would come via stages: society would move from a theological to a metaphysical and finally to the scientific stage of natural elites. In fact, for St. Simon, the spiritual elites of the new social order would be the scientists and the temporal elites would be the industrialists and other property owners. Thus, the rule will be of those educated in science and technology and those owning property. In such a society where the lures of private property might lead to a growth of egoism, the ideal of love between men, i.e., brotherhood, is what will be able to check egoism. The working class can be checked by either using force on them or making them love the new social order. The elites of the new order who understand ideas of

rationality and science can be controlled much better by making them love the new order rather than imposing it on them or repressing them.

In his book *Letters from an Inhabitant in Geneva to his Contemporaries* (1803), he divided the old social order into three distinct classes: the intellectuals like scientists and artists, the haves or the property owners and the have nots comprising the rest of the population who were involved in waging revolutions for equality. As the revolution of the have-nots became more successful and gained momentum, the intellectual stratum would join this revolution as the leaders of the have-nots. The old order was pulled down because this revolution, i.e., the French Revolution, was so successfully carried out by the have-nots that they could not be controlled and contained by the haves. This was largely a result of the loss of intellectual and cultural superiority so long wielded by the clergy, the nobility and the monarch – this superiority was overtaken by the scientists, artists, the intellectuals and the libertarians. For the new social order to once more become a unified social whole in the chaotic aftermath of the Revolution, St. Simon proposed that the spiritual authority of the Church should be replaced by the scientific authority of educated elites based on Newton's laws of gravitation. Christian theology would now become utterly insufficient to restore unity and order in the new society and it would be science alone that would be the basis of order and unity. Therefore, the basic structure of the new social order remains much the same as that of the old order with the only difference being that it is science rather than religion that is the unifying and guiding force in this new society. The elites of the old system are also replaced by new ones – the priests are replaced by the scientists and intellectuals and the feudal lords by property owners and industrialists. The new social order would consist of two groups of population – the productive class and the idle class who have no contribution to the well being or functioning of the society. The productive class would be the producers of the society viz. the bankers, capitalists, managers, scientists and even the manual labourers. The old elite like the priests and nobles would become the class of idlers and they will no longer have any political power, being simply socially tolerated. He is sure that the struggle between the haves and have-nots will go on but he wanted the industrialists to align with the intellectuals and the educated for such an alliance would mean that controlling revolutions of the have-nots would become much easier and therefore social order would be maintained. Therefore, we can see that St. Simon was not one for the dismantling of the status quo.

Saint-Simon came up with the theory of *organic equilibrium* in talking about his social reconstruction programme in the turbulent Napoleonic Empire. The underlying

rationale behind the idea of organicism was threefold – a synthesis of the scientific temper used to study natural phenomena and rationality of the Enlightenment period; the materialistic aspect of society as a result of the growing bourgeois population; and the emphasis on ideological unity. His theories have captured the growing changes in the then European society such as the increased ‘separation of state and civil society, the development of a public sphere consisting of economic, political and cultural institutions independent of centralized, bureaucratic administration. More emphatically than Adam Smith, Saint-Simon defined the state administration as parasitic and hostile to the needs of production and the newly emerging social classes engendered by the process of industrialism’ (Swingewood 1984: 36). In fact, he believed that it was man’s destiny to live in a society where the sciences would triumph and there would be proper administration and greater industrialization rather than living in a military government. Such a society, driven and designed by science and the positivist ideas, was a healthy society in St. Simon’s views.

Any change in the history of a society is related to changes in the religious ideas of that society which in turn is a reflection of the prevailing and ruling beliefs and knowledge systems in that society. Quoting Zeitlin (1968), in St. Simon’s view, ‘[h]istory has passed through polytheism and theism, and now with physicism has left the conjectural stages to arrive at a positive stage in which all knowledge will be unified on a scientific positive basis. The conclusion is therefore inescapable that Saint-Simon conceived both the name and the essentials of positive philosophy’ (60). Therefore, the belief held for so long that it was in fact Auguste Comte who came up with the idea of a positivistic society and the stages of social development and evolution to reach that society is now widely refuted in academic quarters and St. Simon is given his due recognition as one of the founding fathers of sociology long after his death.

6.5 Check your Progress

6.5.1 Answer in Detail

1. Describe in detail Saint-Simon’s vision of the ideal society in the post-Revolution period.
2. It is Saint-Simon rather than Comte who might be considered as the true founding father of sociology. Explain why.
3. Describe the change of society that has happened through three distinct stages according to Saint-Simon.

6.5.2. Answer Briefly

1. What is meant by positivist society?
2. Write a short note on Saint-Simon's theory of organic equilibrium.
3. Who are the natural elites?

6.6. Saint-Simon's View of Class Conflict

For St. Simon, there were two main social classes – the producers and the consumers. The producers were the entrepreneurs, the industrial workers, the scientists and the artists. The consumer class comprised of the aristocrats, the members of the Church, the courtiers and rentiers. There was conflict between the producing and consuming class and only when the non-producing, consuming class would be eliminated there would be order in society. For him, industry was the only way towards development and progress and to set up a new social order in the changed circumstances in the aftermath of the Revolution. Therefore he was interested in promoting industry. To him, industry meant 'all activities that benefited society as a whole. Consequently, it could include the activities of scientists and artists as well as industrial workers... It did not need other classes to produce, but other classes needed industrialists' (Adams & Sydie 2001: 36).

For Saint-Simon, the industrial society would be the most just and equal society in that every person would draw the exact amount of benefits from society as he or she will use his or her abilities to perform tasks in the society. Thus, industrial society is more equitable as tasks and rewards are divided according to one's abilities. As such, industry owners are not inherently superior to industrial workers but simply perform different tasks which are equally beneficial to the progress of society and maintenance of social order. Since industrial society produces on a large scale, therefore industrialization needs an international level of operation. As a result, nationalism would be replaced by global bodies which were beyond the concerns of nation as all industrial producers would become friends by pursuing their common interests of secured production and liberty in exchange. Science, for Saint-Simon, was the answer to egoistic nationalism that continues injustices in society. It would be the basis of an egalitarian society based on the importance of the ideal of rewards commensurate with one's abilities. Saint-Simon's views about a unified global community of producers remains valid and observable to this day where the industrialists are among the major drivers of change and development on an international level.

However, it must be mentioned here that Saint-Simon did not want a society to blindly increase industrial development at the cost of social justice. To him, charity and mutual obligation were of immense importance in maintaining the social order. Economic unity must go hand in hand with spiritual unity and private charity must be transformed into public welfaristendeavours. The public state, guided by a welfarist agenda, must take up three responsibilities – ‘public works, free education and uplifting recreation’ (Adams & Sydie 2001: 37). Thus, the prime quest that Saint-Simon left future sociologists with was the way to find moral unity in a society characterized by positivism and industry.

6.7 Conclusion

Saint-Simon theorized from the vantage point of the overbearing knowledge that the society in which he was born as an aristocrat with associated privileges was at its end and there was a new social order based on science, rationality, positivism and industry that was fast taking shape and this new social order would be the Golden Age of human race and society. Science and industry ensured that the new social order that was developing was so different from the old that there would be no turning back. This is where Saint-Simon differed from other theorists of his time who were theorizing on social change such as Bonald and Maistre. It was the forces within the old system that led to the downfall of the old order rather than the onslaught of forces external to that system. The new system with the new elements that created social order were in a state of organic equilibrium in that these elements were not contradictory forces but rather parts of the entire organic whole that helped in maintaining order in that society. However, he did envision the possibility of class conflict even though in his time there hardly was a flourishing class conflict. Saint-Simon’s writings have been the roots from which much of future classical sociological knowledge has grown such as ideas of positive sociology, organic analogy, class conflict, etc. He has been criticized by Zeitlin (1968), however, on the ground that he had ‘ignored the problem of freedom and had looked forward to an essentially rigid, caste society’ (69).

6.8 Summary

Saint-Simon’s own writings, riddled with lack of clarity and unity, were uplifted in quality when he took on Augustin Thierry as his secretary in 1814 and then August Comte in 1817 after Thierry quit. Comte and Saint-Simon had a very fruitful relationship

of mentor-disciple even though they disagreed on some points regarding the new social order. While Saint-Simon favoured the industrialists and scientists and believed that it was them who were the harbingers of an orderly new social system, Comte was more idealistic and did not want to make any compromises with the elites regarding the question of social order. They also disagreed on their methods. While Saint-Simon wanted to focus on practical issues of the time, Comte was of the opinion that they should begin with theorizing and then try to understand practical issues. While in 'Industry' he had led a scathing attack on Christianity, in his later work entitled 'Politics' (*Le Politique*) he tried to reconcile with the religion by saying that industrialists were morally upright since they followed in the path of Christ. This tendency to return to Christianity became a major bone of contention between him and his young and dynamic secretary Comte. Comte also began to get frustrated for the lack of recognition that he was receiving by collaborating with Saint-Simon. This frustration, coupled with the ideological distance regarding the belief in God, ultimately led Comte to break away from Saint-Simon. After his break with Comte, Saint-Simon immersed himself in the Christian revivalist movement and in his last book published in 1825 titled 'The New Christianity' (*Le Nouveau Christianisme*) he argued for the spread of brotherly love between all men as part of the teachings of Christianity. He said that he had the divine mission to re-establish the moral order of traditional Christianity. He breathed his last just weeks after this work was published. Thus ended the tumultuous academic and personal life of probably the rightful founding father of Sociology.

6.9 Questions

Answer in Detail

1. Based on your understanding of the types of classes in the new social order, explain how St. Simon explained the concept of class conflict.
2. Write a note explaining St. Simon's entire thesis.

Answer Briefly

1. Why was the new social order the Golden Age according to Saint-Simon?
2. What is the role of the government in the new social order according to Saint-Simon?
3. Why is the industrial society an equitable society in Saint-Simon's view?

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MODULE - II

Auguste Comte

Unit 7 □ Positivism

Structure

7.1 Learning Objectives

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7.1 Learning Objectives.

- To get an idea of Comte's thoughts regarding the methodology to be followed in sociology.
- To understand how sociology can benefit from borrowing methodology of sciences.
- To learn about the 'invariant' laws of the natural and social world.
- To know how the scientific study of the social world can help understand the laws on the operations of the social dynamics.

7.2 Introduction

Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is hailed not only as a leading pioneer and founding father of sociology, but also because of his proposal for systematic analysis of society and social issues. As a man born in the turbulent years of post-revolution France, he was passionate about both order and progress in social life and combined the ideas of these two to start an intellectual movement of positivism that ultimately energized first France and then the whole of Europe in the latter part of the 19th century. His intellectual predecessors were the thinkers of the Enlightenment like Pascal (1723-72), Montesquieu (1789- 1755), Turgot (1727 – 81), Condorcet (1743-1794), to name a few. All of them had dreamt of a very bright future for the mankind. Being deeply impressed by their thoughts Comte, too, wanted to ensure the realization of that dream. In 1822 he even prepared a plan for the reorganization of society; though he was not the only person to do so, others like de Bonald and de Maistre also thought of post –revolution reorganization of France. However, soon after the publication of his ‘Plan of the Scientific Operation Necessary for the Reorganization of Society’ in 1822 he could realize the necessity of systematic and disciplined understanding of positivist knowledge through discovery of scientific laws of progress. Thereafter, he presented a more detailed scheme for such an understanding first in 1827 and then in the period between 1830-1842 when he made extensive study and research to publish the six volumes of his Positive Philosophy. Again, during 1851-1854 he published four volumes of The Positive Polity on the positivist principles of society to find a permanent solution for the disorganized state of society in general and French society in particular.

Comte’s ideas were, in fact, not very original in the sense that he successfully combined the existing ideas of his time; the ideas that emerged in the 18th and early 19th centuries, specially under the influence of David Hume and Immanuel Kant. From the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church he came to accept the principle of a hypothetical framework of hierarchy and discipline. The Enlightenment philosophy taught him the importance of historical progress. From St. Simon, with whom Comte worked for several years, he learnt the importance of a unifying social science to explain the existing social organizations but also to plan for a better future. This new positivist learning led to the unveiling of a new social science which he first called ‘social physics’ and then finally ‘sociology’.

7.2.1 Life and Works of Auguste Comte

Isidore Marie Auguste François Xavier Comte was born in Montpellier, France in 1798, just four years after the death of Condorcet. Montpellier was one of the worst cities for Royalist agitation and was in a state of siege when Comte came into the world. His parents were, in Comte's own words, "eminently Catholic and monarchical." They rejected the scepticism and republicanism that followed the French Revolution. The young Comte was contemptuous of his family's views, sympathising deeply with the Revolution and embracing the causes of individual freedom and republicanism from a young age. An advanced and brilliant child, at the age of fourteen he declared he had "naturally ceased believing in God" and had already "gone through all the essential stages of the revolutionary spirit." His rejection of both the Catholicism and royalism of his parents resulted in a difficult relationship with his family throughout his life. However, when one looks at the ideas of the mature Comte it is clear that he was more influenced by his upbringing than he would have cared to admit – his aim to impose order through his High Church of science (with him at the head) has explicit links to both his Catholic background and his father's character and is a far cry from the hatred he expressed for the dictatorial new Emperor Napoleon in his youth.

His early education was at the local lycée, where he studied rhetoric, philosophy, mathematics, humanities and grammar, all of which he excelled at. He was a self-disciplined, hard working student which, combined with an exceptional memory, ensured he did very well. At the age of sixteen he entered the prestigious École Polytechnique. However, in 1817 he got involved in a protest at the school and got himself expelled. He set about filling in the gaps in his knowledge by reading up on subjects such as biology and history and developed a strong interest in thinkers who had attempted to understand the history of human society. Amongst those was Condorcet, whose *Sketch for an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* was to be highly influential on his thinking, Comte himself once describing Condorcet as "my immediate predecessor."

In 1817, soon after his expulsion from the École Polytechnique he wrote his first political essay *My Thoughts: Humanity, Truth, Justice, Liberty, the fatherland of French people*. In this surprisingly mature essay Comte wanted to get to grips with the problem of explaining 'La Terreur' without giving up on defending the Revolution itself

7.3 Origin of Sociology

Systematic study of Sociology started with the Greek philosophers. They started with the presumption that man is a social animal both by nature and necessity and that he needs society both for the sake of life and good life. Plato in his Republic (427-347B.C) and Aristotle in his "Ethics and Politics" discussed society in a considerably systematic manner and method. The Romans, too, took up the study of society. Among them particular mention may be made that of Cicero, who took up the study of society in his book "De – officiis" (On Justice). St. Augustine in his book "De-Civitate Dei" which was written in the 4th century A.D. and Thomas Aquinas in his book "De-Regimine" written in 10th century also discussed different aspect of society. Among others Dante's "De- Monarchia" and Sir Thomas More's "Utopia", Campanella in his "City of the sun" and Sir Francis Bacon's "New Atlantis" also discussed society in great details. The three social contract Philosophers namely Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, also discussed the state of society before and after man became a part of the civilised society. These philosophers discussed the conditions of man in state of nature and also after that. Hugo Grotius, similarly discussed about society in relation to state and also with other states of the world as well.

Broadly it may be said that sociology has had a fourfold origin in political philosophy, the philosophy of history, biological theories of evolution, and the movements for social and political reform which found it necessary to undertake surveys of social conditions". The philosophy of history refers to a sphere of knowledge which studies the meaning of history, its laws and back to antiquity. But it was a distinct creation of the eighteenth century philosopher historians. To combat the influence of theology on history, dating back to St. Augustine, the thinkers of the Enlightenment introduced into philosophy of history the idea of causality, elaborated the theory of progress, emphasised the influence of the geographical and social environment on man. In this way the philosophical historians introduced the new conception. Of society as something more than the "civil society" or the state. They treated society as a system of interrelated institutions, and classified societies into types and distinguished stages in social development. "These features reappear", as says Bottomore, "in the nineteenth century in the works of early sociologists, Comte, Marx and Spencer". This intellectual influence of the philosophy of history largely came through the writings of Hegel and of Saint Simon.

In the nineteenth century the French Philosopher Comte worked out a general approach to the study of society. He believed that the sciences follow one another in a definite

and logical order and that all inquiry goes through certain stages, arriving finally at the last, or positive stage. He established a parallel development of human society from militaristic to legal, and this in turn to an industrial age. He called sociology the “queen of all sciences” and recommended that, as the highest of all sciences, it would use the “positivist” scientific method of observation, experimentation and comparison to understand order and promote progress.

The term Sociology finds its origin from Latin word Societas (Society) and Greek word Logos (Study of Sociology). Thus etymologically Sociology means the study of science of society. Today term “Sociology” has however, differently been defined by different social scientists. One of the earliest definitions of this term was given by Auguste Comte who defined it as a positivist study of whole society.

7.4 Theory of Positivism

Positivism, in Western philosophy, generally, refers to any system that confines itself to the data of experience and excludes a priori or metaphysical speculations. More narrowly, the term designates the thought of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857).

Auguste Comte was the father of Positivism and inventor of the term sociology. He played a key role in the development of the social sciences and was highly influential on thoughts about progress in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He believed that the progress of the human mind had followed an historical sequence which he described as the law of three stages; theological, metaphysical and positive. In the first two stages, attempts were made to understand the nature of things through supernatural and metaphysical explanations. In the positive stage, by contrast, observation and experiment became the principal means to search for truth. Applying the law of three stages first to the development of the sciences, Comte later claimed that it applied to human intellectual development in general and that it held the key to the future progress of humanity.

Comte represents a general retreat from Enlightenment humanism that has continued to this day. His positivist ideology, rather than celebrating the rationality of the individual and wanting to protect people from state interference, fetishised the scientific method, proposing that a new ruling class of technocrats should decide how society should be run and how people should behave. This idea has its seeds in Saint-Simon’s thought but finds its expression in a much more developed authoritarian form in Comte.

7.4.1 Meaning Of Positivism

Philosophy of science is positivism. Positivism is more a philosophy, method rather than a theory. It is that philosophy which preaches that the interpretation of the world is based on human experience. It insists on the application of scientific method of natural sciences to the study of social world. It deals with the application of scientific method by natural scientists and by the sociologists in understanding human-behaviour. The idea of positivism can be traced back to Bacon, Berkeley, Locke and Hume. Before Comte, Saint Simon also advocated positivism. He proposed scientific reorganization of society and promotion of science, since he believed that progress depended on it. The idea of positivism was present in an embryonic form in the mind of Saint Simon and Comte expanded this idea. Positivism brought a revolution or renaissance in the field of social science. It combined a belief in progress and a passion for serving humanity. It is based on the belief that a scientific analysis of history would show the way to cure for the ills of society. The characteristics of positivism are:

- (a) Science is the only valid knowledge.
- (b) Fact is the object of knowledge.
- (c) Philosophy does not possess a method different from science
- (d) The task of philosophy is to find the general principles common to all sciences and to use these principles as guides to human conduct and as the basis of social organization.
- (e) Positivism denies intuition, prior reasoning, theological and metaphysical knowledge.

Several other characteristics, too, can be mentioned here. These are :

1. All Scientific knowledge must be based on direct experience of a reality or direct observation is the surest way to acquire scientific knowledge.
2. The direct experience of a reality could be understood by La certitude, i.e. the unity of scientific method. This implies that the different branches of study are distinguished by their object of study not by their method.
3. The concept of unity of scientific method requires La precise, i.e. a common scientific goal of formulating testable theories. It also implies that there are no value judgements in scientific enquiry.
4. The positivists view science as containing the principle of La utilite i.e. all scientific knowledge must serve some useful purpose. It should be used as a tool for social engineering.

5. Positive knowledge is relative, which means that scientific knowledge is unfinished because there is no absolute knowledge in science. Lastly, science gives prediction and from prediction comes action.

Comte used positivism as a weapon against the negative philosophy prevalent before the French Revolution. That negative philosophy was more concerned with emotional than practical questions. Comte regarded speculations as negative, since it was neither constructive nor practical. As an alternative, Comte invented 'positivism' which remains concerned with the questions about how things are in reality.

Comte's positivism may be described in several ways. One salient point is that it is scientific. Science should not be confused with empiricisms or mere collection of facts. Comte believed that the whole universe is governed by natural laws and these laws could be learned through the method of science. His thoughts thus continue in many ways to be important to contemporary sociology, mostly for his search for invariant laws governing the social and natural worlds. It has influenced profoundly the ways in which sociologists have conducted sociological inquiry. Comte argued that sociologists (and other scholars too), through theory, speculation, and empirical research, could create a realist science that would accurately "copy" or represent the way things actually are in the world. Furthermore, he argued that sociology could become a "social physics" — i.e., a social science on a par with the most positivistic of sciences, i.e., physics. Comte believed that sociology would eventually occupy the very pinnacle of a hierarchy of sciences and then identified four methods of sociology. To this day, in their inquiries sociologists continue to use the methods of observation, experimentation, comparison, and historical research. Many contemporary thinkers criticize positivism, claiming, for example, that not all data is empirically observable. While Comte did write about methods of research, he most often engaged in speculation or theorizing in order to attempt to discover invariant laws of the social world.

7.5 Comte's Positivism

Course de Philosophie Positive, with its six volumes, is considered the most important work of Comte. In these volumes he has narrated how science has been transformed into philosophy. In the first three volumes of the Course he has explored the subjects of popular natural sciences of his time like mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology and in the three other volumes he has discussed the matter of social

sciences. He could easily assume that these two groups of science did not function in the same way because of their basic differences between their subject-matters, scope and methodology. Natural sciences were far better developed, while the social sciences were not born or in a nascent stage of development. Being energized and inspired by the teachings of the natural sciences he took it upon himself the task of creating a new science for meaningful understanding of society. He was in favour of a 'science' of society because, even though the absolute truth might remain elusive, only science could take us closest to it. However, not all the branches of science could be equally appropriate for all kinds of society. In his explanation of the law of the three stages he has classified natural sciences into three types in ascending order matching their corresponding evolutionary stages of society after minute examination of the origin and relevance of these sciences. In fact, the Law of Three Stages and the classification of the sciences constitute the two pillars of Comte's positive philosophy. The second pillar, that is, the classification of sciences, occupies a very important position in his positivism. The six fundamental or basic sciences, according to Comte, are mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology. Though they are different from each other, they are connected together by some invisible bond of unity. With this classification, Comte has established himself as the founder of the modern philosophy of science and the first advocate of the new scientific discipline of sociology. Another of his books, *A General View of Positivism*, also contains his Positivist views and has explained how with the help of Positivism society can be changed into a better order. The hallmark of his time was non-scientific, theological and spiritualist thinking and it compelled him to aspire for a firm theoretical foundation for scientific sociological research. So, he started from the premises of the existence of natural laws of social life, the discovery of which would make the creation of a science of society possible.

From the very beginning, Comte was keen on restoration of social order and improvement of the society with the help of the theories that could be tested. So he sought recourse to the natural laws that could be applied to society and came to believe that natural sciences like biology, astronomy and physics could be quite helpful in developing social science. He also believed that like the discovery of universal laws that govern the physical laws, the unveiling of similar universal laws of the social world would also be possible. Like Durkheim, Comte too, wanted to create an independent domain of scientific study in sociology that would elevate the discipline to the status of 'queen science' and would be considered more important than the much older natural sciences.

7.5.1 Five Principles of Positivism

Comte's theory of positivism stands on five principles. These are:

- a) Uniformity of the logic of inquiry and method in all branches of science.
- b) The goals of inquiry must include discovery, explanation and prediction of truth.
- c) Research in all disciplines should be empirically observable to sensory organs. Scientific knowledge is testable. Research requires empirical proof, deductive logic, verifiable statements, etc.
- d) There definitely exists some difference between scientific knowledge and assumptions based on common sense.
- e) Science should be value-neutral.

Comte had minutely studied the society of his time and came to understand that the real purpose of social reform was intellectual reform. Any change or reorganization of society would be possible only through a synthesis of sciences and with the emergence of positivist politics. He assumed that due to the massive impacts of the two successive revolutions, namely, the French and the Industrial Revolution, the modern society faced a crisis, compelling one social order to degenerate and another to be born. The way out of that crisis was restoration of social order. It also required, he further believed, a positivist or scientific understanding of social affairs. In 1848 he founded the Positivist Society to teach people about the positivist outlook about the world; but the Society failed to garner much support because of the conditions of that time. That made him lonely and dejected in attitude. In spite of absence of support in favour of his positivism his life-long goals remained the same- the moral unity of mankind and the reorganization of society with the help of the new scientific religion of positivism.

7.6 Positivism as Comte's Methodology

Comte's methodology, as we have already seen, aimed at developing the methods for the systematic study of society by rejecting both speculation and extremes of empiricism. For him, the methods of observation, experimentation, comparison and historical analysis remain more appropriate. We would briefly discuss these aspects of his positivist methodology one by one.

- a) **OBSERVATION** : For Comte, observation was the principal method of investigation in sociology even though he could not determine the techniques

to make observation reliable and exact. He believed that the observation of social facts would elevate sociology to the level of science and would enable the sociologists to work with the charter of objectivity. However, he further believed, mere amassing of facts should not be the ultimate goal of sociological investigation, facts should always be supported with fundamental theories. But one serious handicap of sociology was absence of a positive theory for articulating the facts. In fact it created a vicious circle of theory and facts – sociology needed a theory for making observations; observations were also required to create a theory. For making observations free of fault, Comte suggested investigators should be free from unscientific prejudices, and popular opinions, etc. A scientific theory based on observation of facts would discard speculation and would supply the concepts needed for investigation. However, not only direct observations, but also indirect evidence would be of great importance to Comte. For example, historical and cultural memorials, customs and rituals, analysis and comparison of language, etc., all were of great assistance to positivist examination of any event or situation.

- b) **EXPERIMENTATION** : Experimentation, too, according to Comte, was of two types- direct and indirect. Direct experimentation involved investigation of the changes of a phenomenon influenced by the research conditions; whereas indirect or mediated experimentation would like to target investigation of social deviations caused by various social upheavals, sometimes even of a revolutionary character. Comte has likened the social turbulence causing serious deviations from what was normal to illness of an individual body. This simile of illness or the abnormal could also illustrate what could be 'normal' in a much better way.
- c) **COMPARISON** : The third method of investigation, according to Comte, was the method of comparison. This method would compare the similar social situations across the world and also would establish general laws of the nature and developments of societies on the basis of the comparison. He believed that comparisons of animal societies with the human ones to reveal their similarities and dissimilarities quite beneficial just as the the comparison between the classes of one and the same society would be helpful to understand the process of development of human civilization.

Comte, however, was most enthusiastic about the historical method (the method of historical comparison) because it would help one to understand the intricate patterns of growth of some physical, intellectual, moral or political feature or tendency, and the corresponding weakening of the opposite tendency

in the advancement of civilisation. All these knowledge would lead to scientific prediction of the future tendencies conforming to the system of the general laws of human development. Comte, in fact, did not find any remarkable difference between history and sociology which he also referred as political science. For him, historical method could reflect the character of time ; it could also constitute the basic principles and general character of positivism.

7.7. The Classification of Sciences

The central point of Comte's positivism was the separation of the sciences from metaphysical and theological ideas. While theological ideas were associated with blind religious beliefs, metaphysical meant unscientific. True science was the one that relied on facts and observations. Science would discover laws to explain the connections between phenomena and thus would enable one to predict the future. True science was the one that relied on facts and observations. Science would discover laws to explain the connections between phenomena, and thus would enable one to predict the future. Comte was not fond of traditional philosophy because he found it lacking in both its own subject-matter and distinct methodology. So he preferred positive philosophy for systematization of sciences; it required an all-embracing system of sciences to analyse the subject –matter, methods, laws, similarities and differences between types of sciences. He counter-posed sociology as a positive science against the theological and metaphysical speculations about society and man. His positive method was, thus, both anti-spiritualism and anti- philosophical; it united diverse trends and played a progressive role in its time. However, later it proved to be a hindrance against the development of science because of its untrue and historically limited interpretation. He was critical of theology which proclaimed that man was created by God or Providence; at the same time, he also rejected metaphysical philosophy that projected society as the creation of human reason and the rational will of individuals. He had considered sociology as the only science to study the good impact of social life on man's reason and mind. On the basis of that conjecture he later developed a complete theory of the individual as an abstraction and of the society as the reality governed by natural laws.

7.7.1 Positivism And Hierarchy of Sciences

In his three stages Comte combined what he considered to be an account of the historical order of development with a logical analysis of the leveled structure of the sciences. By arranging the six basic and pure sciences one upon the other in a

pyramid, Comte prepared the way for Logical positivism to 'reduce' each level to the one below.

He placed at the fundamental level the science that does not presuppose any other sciences—Mathematics—and then ordered the levels above it in such a way that each science depends upon and makes use of, the sciences below it on the scale ; thus Arithmetic, geometry and mechanics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology and stated that Sociology is the queen of all sciences. Sciences on the levels below, thus enriching this content by successive specialization.

Positive knowledge is based on experience and considers only real phenomena. Comte did not deny the existence of unknown, but positivism was, in no way, concerned with the supernatural. Chambliss has presented the essence of Comtean positivism in the following words, "positivism is not fatalistic, or optimistic or materialistic. It is concerned with the real, rather than fanciful, useful rather than all knowledge."

7.7.2. Positivism and Religion of Humanity

Up to the positive method Comte was highly praised as the founder of science. Auguste Comte was a philosopher among the sociologists and a sociologist among the philosophers; says Raymond Aron. He had a scientific bent of mind. But unfortunately Comte's reformatory zeal overpowered his scientism. He had to reform the French Society. He thought that with the help of science, reformation can be brought to the society.

He wanted to write religion and science. He turned towards religion because he was a philosopher and a social reformist. In the normative aspect, we may include, the concept of positive religion, positive society. Scientific religion was between science and religion. He founded a new religion called the "religion of humanity". This religion of humanity is the scientific interpretation of religion.

7.8 Conclusion

Though, Comte claimed to be the father of positivism or scientific approach; he himself was not committed to it. Prof Timasheff opines, Comte's sociological theories represent a premature jump from the level of observation and inferences to the level of theory. According to John Stuart Mill, Comte's religion does not stand the test of rationalism because that can never be put into practice. He felt Comte's religion was born out of his "moral intoxication". According to Rollin Chambliss, Comte

wanted to build a science of social phenomena. But instead of doing that he struggled to provide his projects of social re-organisation. He built a Utopia instead of science.

7.9 Summary

In spite of these criticism his idea about objectivity and scientific attitude contributed to the progress of social sciences in general. As a philosophical ideology and movement positivism first assumed its distinctive features in the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, who named the systematized science of sociology. It then developed through several stages known by various names, such as empirio-criticism, Logical Positivism and Logical Empiricism and finally in the mid-20th century flowed into the movement known as Analytic and Linguistic philosophy. Comte's positivist philosophy has an important role in shaping modern sociologists because the general perspective today is that theories and ideas in sociology should be based on scientific studies. It's the general belief that true knowledge is only found through science. In short, Comte's idea of positivism is definitely a product of the final stage of society, the scientific stage.

7.10 Questions

Answer in brief :

1. What is the social background of the growth of positivism?
2. Why did Auguste Comte create Sociology as 'social physics'?
3. On which basic principles Auguste Comte's theory of positivism is based on?

Answer in detail:

1. What do you mean by Positivism. How August Comte used this idea in various Sociological analysis.?
2. Discuss in detail Comte's methodology for sociology.
3. What role did Comte's contemporary society play in the shaping of his positivism?

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Unit 8 □ Law of Three Stages

Structure

- 8.1 Learning Objectives**
- 8.2 Introduction**
- 8.3 The Law of Three Stages**
 - 8.3.1 Chart of the Three Stages**
- 8.4 The Stages**
- 8.5 Conclusion**
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- 8.7 Questions**
- 8.8 Reference**
- 8.9 Glossary**

8.1 Learning Objectives

This unit helps the learners -

- To know and understand Comte's ideas about the need for sociology.
- To understand the connection between mental development and social progress.
- To know why sociology is to be considered the supreme most science.

8.2 Introduction

Comte's foremost contribution in the field of sociology, apart from giving the discipline its name, is his theory of 'Law of Three Stages'. In developing this he was, like many scholars of his time, greatly influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of organic evolution and presented a theory of gradual stage-wise evolution of man's ability and corresponding evolution of human civilization. Comte has described it as the universal law of intellectual development and through it he has shown that each branch of man's knowledge passes through three different theoretical conditions- the theological or fictitious; the metaphysical or abstract and the scientific or positive. In his opinion, human intellect and social progress both simultaneously pass through three important

stages of development towards the next higher stage of maturity. Human individual, as he explains, remains an ardent believer during childhood, then becomes a critical metaphysician and finally turns into a philosopher in adult life. Side by side, the society also goes through similar stage-wise transformation from theological or fictitious stage to metaphysical or abstract stage to finally positive or scientific stage. It is one of the most foundational ideas of Comte's positivism. He has observed that through a continuous development of positive sciences, the society will transform into a more developed state. The theory of the law of three stages is found in his best known work 'The Course in Positive Philosophy' and it states that the society itself develops in three distinct mentally conceived stages: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive ones. This concept is the corner stone of Comte's theory.

Comte was convinced that no data could be adequately understood except in the historical context. Phenomena are intelligible only in terms of their origin, function, and significance in the relative course of human history. His theory of law of three stages is closely related with the concept of positivism. Positivism, as a way of thinking, is based on the assumption that it is possible to observe social life and establish reliable, valid knowledge about how it works. This knowledge can then be used to affect the course of social change; the law of the three stages attempts to show that the history of the human mind and the development of the sciences follow a pattern which parallels the growth of social and political institutions.

In Comte's view, the evolution of thought throughout history paralleled his "three phases of intellectual development" for individuals as they mature throughout their lifetimes. The first is the theological phase, where natural phenomena are seen as the result of divine power(s). The second, or metaphysical phase sees these as manifestations from vital forces or takes natural processes to be imperfect imitations of eternal ideas. The positive phase is the last in the sequence, and consists of scientific inquiry, as governed by the scientific method. In this phase, one seeks explanations that are descriptive laws; generalizations over several instances that are based on a foundation of positive facts. This phase forms the basis of Comte's idea of positivism (Positivism). For Comte, it was a rejection of metaphysics in favor of scientific reason. Even his view on the arts shows this preference; he believed that the arts enforced the truths of science. It is important to note that Comte's positivism was different in many ways to logical positivism. He rejected the idea that there are universal criteria that can be used to distinguish scientific statements from nonscientific ones, and also discarded the reductionist ideal of the logical positivists.

8.3 The Law of Three Stages

Comte's foremost contribution in sociology, apart from giving the discipline its name, is his theory of the Law of Three Stages. He was, like many scholars of his time, greatly influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of organic evolution and with his theory he presented an idea of gradual, stage-wise evolution of man's thinking ability and corresponding evolution of social order and material conditions of human life. For Comte, this was the universal law of intellectual development to reveal the transformation of man's knowledge under three different theoretical conditions like the theological or fictitious, the metaphysical or abstract and the scientific or positive. The society also underwent similar transformation through three important stages of development, each progressing towards the next higher stage of maturity. He has explained this progression with the metaphor of human development; human beings, in general, were believers in their childhood, grew up as critical metaphysicians and finally became philosophers in their adult life. He assumed that imitating this journey of mind and a continuous development of positive sciences, the society would transform into a more developed state. This concept of gradual social and intellectual development became the cornerstone of Comte's theory.

It is an example of his search for invariant laws governing the social world. Comte argued that the human mind, individual human beings, all knowledge, and world history developed through three successive stages. According to Comte, each branch of our knowledge passes successively through the different theoretical conditions. This is known as law of three stages. The main aim of this principle is to provide the basis of sociological thinking. In the formulation of this concept of Law of social development he was clearly influenced by the philosophical concepts of Turgot, Condorcet, and Saint-Simon. He termed these stages the theological–military, metaphysical–judicial, and scientific–industrial or “positivistic.” Each stage has been typified by a particular “spirit”—a notion that first appeared with Montesquieu and was expanded by Condorcet—and by temporal or structural conditions. Thus, the theological–military stage is dominated by ideas that refer to the supernatural while being structured around slavery and the military. The metaphysical–judicial stage, which follows from the theological and represents a transition to the scientific stage, is typified by ideas that refer to the fundamental essences of phenomena and by elaborate political and legal forms. The scientific–industrial stage is dominated by the “positive philosophy of science” and industrial patterns of social organization. This theory of Comte's appeared in 1822 in his work ‘Politique Positive’.

In this context, Comte's three stages of mental development and their corresponding social structural arrangements manifested in three phases can be shown in the following chart:

8.3.1 Chart of the Three Stages

STAGES	TYPE OF SOCIA STRUCTURE	EVOLUTION OF HUMAN MIND
1 ST STAGE	MILITARISTIC SOCIETY	THEOLOGICAL STAGE
2 nd STAGE	LEGALISTIC SOCIETY	METAPHYSICAL STAGE
3 rd STAGE	INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY	POSITIVE STAGE

8.4. The Stages

We need a brief discussion of Comte's scheme of social and mental progression here.

i) The Theological/ Fictitious Stage

In this stage human beings rely on supernatural agencies to explain what they cannot explain otherwise. The Theological, which is the original and spontaneous form of thought, regards the facts of the universe as governed not by invariable laws of sequence, but by single and direct volitions of beings, real or imaginary, possessed of life and intelligence. In the infantile state of reason and experience, individual objects are looked upon as animated. The next step is the conception of invisible beings, each of whom superintends and governs an entire class of objects or events. The last merges this multitude of divinities in a single God, who made the whole universe in the beginning, and guides and carries on its phenomena by his continued action, or, as others think, only modifies them from time to time by special interferences. [Mill's summary]. The theological stage is dominated by a search for the essential nature of things, and people come to believe that all phenomena are created and influenced by gods and supernatural forces. Monotheism is the ultimate belief of the theological stage. According to Comte in this stage, "all theoretical conceptions, whether general or special bear a supernatural impress". Unable to discover the natural causes of the various happenings, the primitive men attributed them to imaginary or divine forces. This stage is also divided into three sub-stages as (a) Fetishism (b) Polytheism (c) Monotheism.

- a) Fetishism -The primitive persons everywhere tend to think in supernatural terms. They believe that all phenomena are “produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings.” They believe in all kinds of fetishes in which spirits or supernatural beings live. Hence, “New ideas and structural arrangements are added to, and build on, the old” as a form of religion started and it admitted of no priesthood, because its gods are individuals, each residing in fixed objects. During this sub-stage, man accepts the existence of the spirit or the soul. It did not admit priesthood.
- (b) Polytheism- When the mind of primitive man became better organized, fetishism became cumbersome. Too many fetishes created confusion. Hence, they started believing in several gods. Thus arose polytheism. They created the class of priests to get the goodwill and the blessings of these gods. The presence of too many gods also created for them mental contradictions. During this sub-stage, man begins to believe in magic and allied activities. He then transplants or imposes special god in every object. Thus they believed in several gods and created the class of priests to get the goodwill and the blessings of these gods
- (c) Monotheism- Finally, they developed the idea of one god, or of monotheism. They started believing in the superhuman power of only one god. Slowly feelings and imaginations started giving place to thinking and rationality. During this sub- stage of the theological stage man used to believe that there was only one center of power which guided and controlled all the activities of the world. Thus man believed in the superhuman power of only one god.

ii) The Metaphysical State

Comte said that this stage started around the middle ages in Europe, or somewhere around the 1300s. In the metaphysical stage of society, people viewed the world and events as natural reflections of human tendencies. People in this stage still believed in divine powers or gods, but they believed that these beings were more abstract and less directly involved in what happened on a daily basis. Therefore, all problems in the world, it was assumed, were due to defects in humanity.

The metaphysical thinking was almost an extension of the theological thinking. Rationalism replaced imagination, with the conviction that each and every phenomenon was not a divine creation. Pure reasoning insists that God is an

Abstract Being. Reasoning helped man to find out some order in the natural world. This stage, being an improvement upon the earlier stage, believed that the abstract power or force guided and determined the events in the world. Metaphysical thinking discarded belief in concrete god . That stage was a transitional stage in which mysterious, abstract forces of nature replaced supernatural forces as the powers to explain the workings of the world.

The continuity, regularity and infallibility found in the natural order were attributed to some “Principles” or “Power”. Thus, principles and theories gained ascendancy over feelings and speculations. Even these metaphysical explanations were unsatisfactory to the mind. Still this kind of thinking corresponded with the legal type of society

iii) The Positivist / Scientific Stage

The positivist stage is the last and the highest stage in Comte’s work. In this stage, people search for invariant laws that govern all of the phenomena of the world. Comte’s final stage for society is called the positive stage. As the name implies, here people confront the world and events from a scientific point of view. In modern society, most people agree that the planets are physical objects made up of gas or rock; they can understand that sickness is caused by germs and that medicine is the appropriate cure. If an earthquake happens, most people believe that is because of movement in the tectonic plates, not because a god is upset.

While it is easy for people who live in the modern scientific stage to look back on people in the first two stages with dismay and to assume some of their beliefs as silly, two things should be kept in mind. First, lots of modern people still believe that one or more gods have active roles to play in what happens to our lives, and many people in modern society still believe in astrology. Second, our future generations may also consider many of our beliefs and assumptions silly, or prejudiced and unscientific.

The positive stage represents the scientific way of thinking. As Comte stated, “In the final or the positive stage, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin and destination of the universe, and the causes phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws – that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance.” The observation and classification of facts are the beginning of the scientific stage, where there is no place for any belief or superstition. Everything is explained rationally and scientifically.

Comte developed his concept of positivism, which is a purely intellectual way of looking at the world. He stressed the need for observation and classification of phenomena. In his opinion, uniformities or laws were observable but any attempt to assign cause to these uniformities were mere speculations. Positivism actually glorified observation and classification of data. The positive thinking suited the needs of the industrial society.

In short, these stages represent different and opposed types of human conception. The most primitive type is theological thinking, which rests on the “empathetic fallacy” of reading subjective experience into the operations of nature. The theological perspective develops dialectically through fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism as events are understood as animated by their own will, that of several deities, or the decree of one Supreme Being. Politically the theological state provides stability under kings imbued with divine rights and supported by military power. As civilization progresses, the metaphysical stage begins as a criticism of these conceptions in the name of a new order. Supernatural entities are gradually transformed into abstract forces just as political rights are codified into systems of law. In the final stage of positive science the search for absolute knowledge is abandoned in favor of a modest but precise inquiry into the relative laws of nature. The absolutist and feudal social orders are replaced gradually by increasing social progress achieved through the application of scientific knowledge.

As an evolutionist Comte believed that evolution had brought in progress by creating stages that were far advanced than the preceding ones. In the third or positive stage, the society underwent a huge transformation with tremendous surge in industries with the help of advancement in science and technology. The task of science, as he believed, was to discover the laws that could connect phenomena in an orderly way; the discovery of these laws would make prediction of future possible. He divided sciences into two basic categories - abstract and concrete- each supplementing the others. He identified five abstract theoretical sciences like astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology that supplemented four natural and one social phenomenon. Due to the great complexity of social phenomena and their dependence on all the other phenomena, the discipline to study it, that is, sociology arrived at a later stage, only after all other sciences had developed. Being enamored by science and scientific ideas, he named the young positive discipline of society first as ‘social physics’ and then as ‘sociology’. He had placed sociology, the child of positive philosophy and science, at the apex and mathematics at the bottom of the Science Pyramid. The ascending order

of sciences from bottom to top was like this – mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and finally, sociology. However, Comte never considered such an order of sciences watertight, as the laws of one science had often influenced the laws of the other sciences. This symbiotic relationship of sciences was Comte's unique contribution towards sociology. Before him, there was only encyclopedic knowledge about sociology, but no scientific knowledge about its symbiotic nature. In presenting this analysis, Comte felt that he had uncovered several laws of social statics because he believed that differentiation, centralization of power, and development of a common morality were fundamentally related to the maintenance of the social order. Although he did not carry his analysis far, he presented both Herbert Spencer and Durkheim with one of the basic theoretical questions in sociology and the broad contours of the answer.

Comte's view of the laws of succession are important and several points should be noted:

First, each stage sets the conditions for the next. For example, without efforts to explain references to the supernatural, subsequent efforts at more refined explanations would not have been possible; or without kinship systems, subsequent political, legal, and military development would not have occurred, and the modern division of labor would not have been possible.

Second, the course of Integration flows through mutual interdependence, centralization of authority, and common culture.

The social differentiation increases potential for social pathology problems of integration, coordination and control.

Comte saw all idea systems as passing through the theological and metaphysical stages and then moving into the final, positivistic, stage. Ideas about all phenomena must pass through these phases, with each stage setting the conditions for the next and with considerable intellectual turmoil occurring during the transition from one stage to the next. Ideas about various phenomena, however, do not pass through these stages at the same rate, and, in fact, a positivistic stage in thought about one realm of the universe must often be reached before ideas about other realms can progress to the positivistic stage. The opening pages of *Positive Philosophy* emphasize, we must bear in mind that the different kinds of our knowledge have passed through the three stages of progress at different rates, and have not therefore arrived at the same time. The rate of advance depends upon the nature of knowledge in question, so distinctly that, as we shall see hereafter, this consideration constitutes an accessory

to the fundamental law of progress. Any kind of knowledge reaches the positive stage in proportion to its generality, simplicity, and independence of other departments.

Thus, thought about the physical universe reaches the positive stage before conceptions of the organic world do because the inorganic world is simpler and organic phenomena are built from inorganic phenomena.

Comte's "Law of the Three Stages evolution is additive.

They are first supplemented with new ideas and structural arrangements which are added to, and built on the old.

Second, these are dominated by new social and cultural arrangements.

Third, during the transition from one stage to the next, elements of the preceding stage tend to conflict with elements of the emerging stage, creating a period of anarchy and turmoil.

Fourth, the metaphysical stage is a transitional stage, operating as a bridge between theological speculation and positivistic philosophy.

Fifth, the nature of cultural ideas determines the nature of social structural (temporal) arrangements and circumscribe to what social arrangements are possible.

And sixth, with the advent of the positivistic stage, true understanding of how society operates is possible, allowing the manipulation of society in accordance with the laws of statics and dynamics.

Although societies must eventually pass through these three stages, they do so at different rates. Probably the most important of the variable empirical conditions influencing the rate of societal succession is population size and density, an idea taken from Montesquieu and later refined by Durkheim. Thus, Comte felt that he had discovered the basic law of social dynamics in his analysis of the three stages, and coupled with the laws of statics, a positivistic science of society—that is, social physics or sociology—would allow for the reorganization of the tumultuous, transitional, and conflict dominated world of the early nineteenth century philosophy.

Several points in this law were given greater emphasis in Comte's later work. It states that society as a whole, and each particular science, develops through these mentally conceived stages. in which idea systems, and their corresponding social structural arrangements, pass through these phases:

First, the social world reveals both cultural and structural dimensions, with the nature of culture or idea systems being dominant— an idea probably taken from Condorcet

Second, idea systems, and the corresponding structural arrangements that they produce,

must reach their full development before the next stage of human evolution can occur. Thus, one stage of development creates the necessary conditions for the next.

Third, there is always a period of crisis and conflict as systems move from one stage to the next because elements of the previous stage conflict with the emerging elements of the next stage.

Fourth, movement is always a kind of oscillation, for society does not always advance in a straight line. There are always some ups and downs and chaos in the path of the society's advancement. Comte was convinced that the cultural ideas about the world were subject to the dictates of this law. All ideas about the nature of the universe must move from a theological to a scientific, or positivistic, stage. Yet some ideas about different aspects of the universe move more rapidly through the three stages than others do. Indeed, only when all the other sciences— first astronomy, then physics, later chemistry, and finally physiology—have successively reached the positive stage the conditions necessary for social physics have finally been met. He assumed that with the development of this last great science, it would become possible to reorganize society by scientific principles rather than by theological or metaphysical speculations.

8.5 Conclusion

In conclusion it may be said that though there are many incongruities in Comte's theory of social and intellectual evolution, we cannot deny that he was the first thinker to accord the highest place to social physics or sociology. He has also enriched the world of sociology by pinpointing the time and reason of its birth and also by explaining why sociology has emerged much later only when the intellectual development of mankind seemed right for sustaining such a mature and advanced discipline. With time his vision of humanity had undergone changes and he preached love and universal brotherhood for sustainable and peaceful development of society, we may or may not accept those ideas but we must appreciate his quest for a positivist science of society through various stages of society.

8.6 Summary

Comte's contribution in the birth of sociology can never be denied; neither can we deny the role he played in the initial nurturing of the discipline; he named it and

systematized it ,too. At the same time, we cannot deny that it has been subjected to severe criticism and rejection by many later-date sociologists.

According to Prof. N.S. Timasheff, Comte's law of the three stages is clearly invalid because it has failed to stand the test of time nor does it stand the test of facts discovered later. supersedes the religious approach; rather, there has been accumulation and often admixture of the three. E.S. Bogardus comments that Comte has failed to postulate a fourth mode of thinking, namely, socialized thinking, or a system of thought which may emphasize the purpose of building the constructive, just, and harmonious societies.,

It is evident that Comte's Law of Three Stages has a strong idealistic bias. Comte has made it abundantly clear that the intellectual evolution is the most important aspect in human progress. Still, he was aware of the importance of factors such as increase in population, division of labor, etc. in determining the rate of social progress.

8.7 Questions

Answer in brief : 5 Marks

1. What is Law of Three Stages?
2. What are the three stages of evolution?
3. How does Comte explain the late emergence of sociology?
4. What is Theological/Fictitious stage?
5. What is Metaphysical/Abstract stage?
6. What is Positive/Scientific stage?

Answer in detail : 10 Marks

1. Make a critical assessment of Comte's theory of evolution and progress.
2. Discuss, after Comte, the stages of intellectual and social development. Why did sociology emerge later than other sciences?

8.8 Reference

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8.9 Glossary

Charles Darwin: Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882) was one of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century. He was an English naturalist, geologist and biologist who advocated the theory of evolution by natural selection. His most important work was *On the Origin of Species*; before it got finally published in 1859, he had to wait about twenty two years after finishing his research on the subject in 1836 for fear of backlashes from the conservative sections of the society.

Theory of Organic Evolution : The theory of organic evolution was one of the hot topics of the nineteenth century Europe; it states that evolution of species occurs by natural selection. The central point of this theory is that due to variations in their genes and physical characteristics, the individuals in a species that are best to adjust with their changing environment are most likely to survive. The theory thus establishes the concept of ‘survival of the fittest’.

Positivism: It is a theory that recognizes only that which can be scientifically verified or proved. Therefore it rejects metaphysics and theism.

Unit 9 □ Hierarchy of Sciences

Structure

- 9.1 Objectives**
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- 9.3 Comte's Law of Three Stages**
 - 9.3.1 Theological Stage**
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- 9.4 The Hierarchical Order of the Sciences**
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 - 9.4.2 Astronomy: The First of the Observational Sciences**
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 - 9.4.4 Chemistry: The Study of Molecular Interactions**
 - 9.4.5 Biology: The Study of Life and Organic Systems**
 - 9.4.6 Sociology: The Study of Human Society**
- 9.5 The Relationship between the Sciences**
 - 9.5.1 Sequential and Cumulative Nature of Scientific Progress**
 - 9.5.2 Interdependence of the Sciences**
- 9.6 Comte's Vision for Sociology: The "Crowning Science"**
- 9.7 Critiques and Legacy of Comte's Vision**
- 9.8 Conclusion**
- 9.9 Summary**
- 9.10 Questions**
- 9.11 References**
- 9.12 Glossary**

9.1 Objectives

After completing this chapter, learners will be able to:

- Comprehend the fundamental principles behind the hierarchy of the sciences as proposed by Auguste Comte.
- Analyze the relationship between the Law of Three Stages and the development of sciences.
- Understand the interdependence of various scientific disciplines within the Comtean classification.
- Identify the methodological characteristics and complexities of each scientific discipline in the hierarchy.
- Critically assess the relevance and limitations of Comte's classification in contemporary science studies.

9.2 Introduction

Auguste Comte, a prominent 19th-century French philosopher, is widely acknowledged as the father of sociology. His contribution to the philosophy of science, especially through his theory of the Hierarchy of Sciences, provides a systematic framework for understanding the progression of human knowledge. In his major work, *System of Positive Polity* (1854), Comte proposed a classification of the sciences in which each discipline depends on the ones that precede it, ultimately culminating in sociology as the most complex and advanced science. His concept of a positive science, grounded in empirical observation and experimentation, emphasized that scientific knowledge should aim to explain phenomena based on facts and observable events, rejecting speculative and theological explanations.

Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences was not merely an academic classification but was also intended to highlight the progress of human understanding, wherein each science evolves as society progresses intellectually. Sociology, according to Comte, would emerge as the "crowning science," bringing together the principles of all the sciences and applying them to the study of human society. His vision laid the foundation for the development of sociology as a scientific discipline and guided future generations of social scientists in their quest to understand societal structures, social relations, and the forces that drive social change.

The Hierarchy of Sciences reflects Comte's belief in the scientific method as the key to understanding the world. In this model, the sciences are arranged according to their degree of complexity, their relationship to one another, and the level of abstraction involved in their study. The hierarchy, which begins with mathematics at the bottom and ascends to sociology at the top, illustrates not only the development of scientific knowledge but also the interdependence of various scientific disciplines.

Comte's approach to the study of society and science was a break from the traditional methods of inquiry in his time, emphasizing an empirical, observation-based approach over metaphysical and theological speculations. His positivism, which advocates for the use of the scientific method in all areas of life, became one of the most influential intellectual movements of the 19th century. The impact of his work extended beyond philosophy and sociology, influencing fields such as anthropology, psychology, and political science.

9.3 Comte's Law of Three Stages

At the heart of Comte's thought is the **Law of Three Stages**, which posits that intellectual development follows a fixed trajectory, moving from a theological understanding of the world to a metaphysical one and finally reaching a positive stage. This idea is central to understanding how Comte viewed the progression of human knowledge and the development of the sciences. Each stage represents a shift in the way societies and individuals perceive and explain the world around them.

9.3.1 Theological Stage

The **theological stage** is characterized by the belief that supernatural forces or deities govern the natural world. In this stage, people explain natural phenomena through religious doctrines, attributing events such as storms, illnesses, or social misfortunes to the will of gods or spirits. This stage reflects an early form of human understanding, where the unknown is explained by invoking higher powers. According to Comte, during the theological stage, societies rely heavily on religious authorities to define what is true or real. This is a time of religious dogma, and it represents a period where knowledge is largely speculative and unverified by empirical observation.

Comte suggested that the theological stage was a necessary precursor to the metaphysical stage, as it laid the foundation for the human desire to understand the world. However, he also viewed this stage as being intellectually limiting, as it did not offer systematic or reliable ways to test or verify explanations about the world. In

societies dominated by theological thought, knowledge is seen as divine revelation rather than as a product of human observation and reason.

9.3.2 Metaphysical Stage

The **metaphysical stage** marks a shift away from religious explanations and into abstract, philosophical reasoning. In this stage, human beings begin to use reason and abstract concepts to explain the world. However, metaphysical explanations still remain speculative and lack empirical validation. Philosophers in this stage are concerned with the essence of things and try to explain phenomena through abstract principles such as “substance,” “essence,” or “cause.” This stage represents a more advanced way of thinking than the theological stage but is still based on abstract reasoning rather than empirical observation.

In Comte’s view, the metaphysical stage was a necessary step in the development of human knowledge, as it helped to move beyond religious dogma and established a framework for understanding the world through abstract principles. However, Comte also saw the metaphysical stage as being flawed because it did not rely on empirical evidence or the scientific method. This, he argued, limited its ability to produce reliable knowledge about the world.

9.3.3 Positive Stage

The final stage in Comte’s law is the **positive stage**, which represents the culmination of human intellectual development. In this stage, human beings reject religious and metaphysical explanations in favor of empirical, scientific reasoning. The positive stage emphasizes observation, experimentation, and the development of laws and theories that can be tested and verified. Comte argued that knowledge in the positive stage is grounded in facts and observable phenomena, and that scientific methods should be applied to every aspect of life, including the study of society.

The positive stage is, according to Comte, the most advanced and rational stage of intellectual development. It marks the point at which humanity begins to fully embrace the scientific method and applies it not only to the natural world but also to social phenomena. Comte saw the positive stage as the key to human progress, as it allowed individuals and societies to move beyond speculation and superstition and instead focus on observable, verifiable facts.

9.4 The Hierarchical Order of the Sciences

In Comte's framework, the sciences are organized hierarchically, with each discipline building upon the principles and discoveries of the sciences that came before it. This structure reflects Comte's belief in the increasing complexity and specificity of scientific knowledge as one moves up the hierarchy.

9.4.1 Mathematics: The Foundation of the Sciences

Mathematics occupies the lowest level in Comte's hierarchy of sciences, but it is the foundation upon which all other sciences are built. Comte believed that mathematics was the essential tool for understanding the world and that all scientific knowledge ultimately depends on mathematical reasoning. Mathematics, according to Comte, is the study of relationships between quantities and measurements, and it provides the means for describing and understanding natural laws in the most precise and universal way.

While mathematics is the simplest of the sciences in terms of its subject matter, it is indispensable to the development of all other scientific disciplines. Comte argued that without a solid understanding of mathematics, it would be impossible to make meaningful progress in the study of other sciences. As such, mathematics forms the base of the hierarchy, providing the basic principles that guide scientific inquiry in fields ranging from astronomy to sociology.

9.4.2 Astronomy: The First of the Observational Sciences

The next level in the hierarchy is **astronomy**, the study of celestial bodies and their movements. Astronomy, according to Comte, is the first science to achieve the status of a positive science, because it relies on systematic observation and mathematical analysis to explain the movements of planets, stars, and other celestial phenomena. Astronomy, although more complex than mathematics, is still relatively simple in comparison to the other sciences, as it deals with predictable and observable phenomena that can be measured and calculated.

Astronomy represents the earliest application of mathematical reasoning to natural phenomena, and it provided the first major breakthrough in the scientific revolution that Comte believed paved the way for the development of the other sciences. As such, astronomy occupies a crucial place in the hierarchy of sciences, as it sets the stage for the application of the scientific method to other fields of study.

9.4.3 Physics: The Study of Matter and Energy

At the next level of the hierarchy is **physics**, which deals with the fundamental principles of matter, energy, and the forces that govern their interactions. Physics is

a more complex science than astronomy because it involves the study of natural phenomena in greater detail and at a more fundamental level. Physics is concerned with understanding the laws that govern the behavior of physical substances, ranging from the smallest particles of matter to the largest structures in the universe.

Physics builds on the discoveries of mathematics and astronomy, and it provides the tools necessary to explain phenomena in a wide range of fields, from mechanics and thermodynamics to optics and electromagnetism. The development of physics represents a critical stage in the evolution of scientific thought, as it allowed scientists to move beyond purely descriptive observations and begin to develop theories that could explain the underlying mechanisms of natural phenomena.

9.4.4 Chemistry: The Study of Molecular Interactions

Chemistry, placed above physics in the hierarchy of sciences, represents a critical step forward in scientific complexity. Chemistry deals with the properties, composition, and behavior of substances, particularly focusing on the molecular and atomic levels. It marks a departure from the study of general physical laws to the exploration of specific interactions and transformations between elements and compounds. Comte, in his time, viewed chemistry as one of the most rapidly advancing sciences because of its ability to provide practical knowledge that could be applied to a variety of fields such as medicine, industry, and agriculture.

The subject matter of chemistry is inherently more complex than physics because it involves multiple interacting substances, each with its own properties, rather than general principles of matter and energy. While physics investigates universal laws governing forces and matter in general, chemistry zeroes in on how substances combine, react, and transform. The shift from physics to chemistry reflects a move from the study of broad phenomena to the investigation of more specialized and specific relationships within matter.

In the historical development of the sciences, chemistry relied on the principles of both physics and mathematics, particularly as chemistry began to embrace experimentation and quantification. The development of atomic theory and the periodic table, for instance, brought about an increasingly systematic and empirical approach to understanding chemical reactions. Chemistry also provided a bridge between the purely physical sciences and the more complex life sciences, influencing fields such as biology and medicine. As a result, chemistry plays a pivotal role in the advancement of natural sciences, providing explanations for phenomena that could not be fully understood through physics alone.

9.4.5 Biology: The Study of Life and Organic Systems

At the upper levels of the hierarchy, **biology** represents the study of life itself, focusing on the properties and processes that characterize living organisms. Biology examines the structure, function, growth, evolution, and interactions of living organisms with their environments. Unlike the inorganic sciences, which deal with non-living matter, biology is concerned with the unique properties of living systems, including their ability to reproduce, grow, and respond to stimuli.

The shift from chemistry to biology represents a move from the molecular to the organic. While chemistry studies the composition and transformation of substances, biology applies these principles to understand how living organisms function as whole systems. Biology also explores the interconnectedness of organisms, ecosystems, and evolutionary processes. The complexity of biological systems requires a more nuanced approach, drawing on knowledge from chemistry, physics, and mathematics to explore phenomena such as cellular processes, genetics, and evolutionary dynamics.

Comte's classification of biology as one of the higher sciences acknowledges its inherent complexity, as biology studies systems that are constantly changing and evolving. Moreover, biology's reliance on experimentation and observation parallels the methods used in the physical sciences. Biology draws on the knowledge accumulated by earlier sciences to study the intricate mechanisms of life, including biochemical processes and the physiological functions that allow organisms to survive and adapt. Biology's importance in the hierarchy of sciences also lies in its ability to inform other disciplines. For example, medical science depends heavily on biological principles to understand diseases, treatments, and human anatomy. Similarly, biological insights influence fields like psychology, ecology, and environmental science, reinforcing biology's foundational role in shaping our understanding of living systems.

9.4.6 Sociology: The Study of Human Society

At the apex of Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences lies **sociology**, the scientific study of society, social behavior, and social institutions. Comte considered sociology the "crowning science" because it is the most complex of all the sciences, requiring the integration of knowledge from biology, chemistry, physics, and even astronomy. Sociological phenomena, unlike the phenomena studied in other sciences, are deeply influenced by human behavior, social structures, and historical context, making sociology particularly challenging and sophisticated.

Sociology investigates the patterns of social relationships, institutions, and structures that shape human behavior. It also explores the ways in which individuals and groups

interact, form identities, and create meaning within society. Comte's vision for sociology was revolutionary in its time, as it sought to apply the scientific method—observational, empirical, and systematic—to the study of social phenomena. Sociology would no longer be the realm of speculative philosophy or theological doctrine, but a rigorous science grounded in facts and scientific reasoning.

The reason sociology occupies the top of Comte's hierarchy is that it synthesizes insights from all the preceding sciences. It depends on the findings of biology, especially in the study of human behavior and evolution, and it uses chemistry and physics to explain environmental and physical factors that affect society. Furthermore, sociology utilizes mathematical tools to analyze social trends, demographic data, and patterns of behavior across populations.

Sociology is not merely concerned with the study of individual behavior; it explores the dynamics of collective action, social movements, institutions, and cultural norms. By focusing on social structures and patterns, sociology seeks to uncover the laws that govern social behavior and offer solutions to societal problems. In this sense, sociology is both a tool for understanding and a means for improving the human condition.

For Comte, sociology would eventually allow society to move beyond chaotic or disorderly social conditions and lead to a more organized and rational society. The methods used in sociology—observation, comparison, and classification—would help uncover the laws of social dynamics, much as the natural sciences had uncovered the laws of nature.

9.5 The Relationship between the Sciences

In Comte's hierarchical framework, the sciences are interconnected in a complex web of dependence. Each science builds on the knowledge and methods of the sciences that precede it, contributing to the gradual accumulation of human understanding. This interdependence highlights the evolving complexity of scientific inquiry, where each step forward in intellectual development requires an understanding of the foundations established by earlier disciplines.

9.5.1 Sequential and Cumulative Nature of Scientific Progress

Comte's hierarchy is structured around the idea that scientific knowledge progresses in a cumulative and sequential manner. This means that each new discipline that emerges relies on the discoveries and methodologies of the preceding ones. For

example, sociology, as the most complex science, draws on the knowledge established by biology, chemistry, physics, and astronomy. At the same time, sociology also provides a framework for understanding how all of these sciences contribute to the functioning of human societies.

This sequential nature of scientific progress reflects Comte's belief in the **Law of Three Stages**, where each discipline passes through a process of development from theological or metaphysical explanations to positive, scientific understanding. Sociology, the most complex and advanced science, emerged only after the other sciences had reached a sufficient level of development. In Comte's view, this process of scientific development reflects the broader evolution of human thought, where societies progress from superstition and speculation to empirical observation and rational analysis.

9.5.2 Interdependence of the Sciences

Beyond their sequential order, the sciences are also interdependent. For instance, sociology relies on biology for insights into human behavior and social structures, just as biology depends on chemistry to explain the molecular basis of life. In this way, the sciences are not isolated from one another but are part of an interconnected web of knowledge. The study of society cannot be fully understood without taking into account the biological, physical, and chemical factors that shape human life. Similarly, the development of a comprehensive theory of society requires input from all the other sciences.

This interdependence is one of the key features of Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences, and it underscores the complexity of understanding the natural world and human society. Each science contributes a unique perspective and methodology to the broader understanding of reality, and the cumulative knowledge produced by these disciplines forms the foundation for the study of more complex phenomena, including social behavior.

9.6 Comte's Vision for Sociology: The "Crowning Science"

Auguste Comte's classification of sciences culminates with sociology, which he famously described as the "crowning superstructure" of the scientific hierarchy. This designation did not imply that sociology was superior to other sciences but rather emphasized its role in synthesizing and contextualizing knowledge generated by other fields. Sociology, according to Comte, is uniquely equipped to understand and address the complexities of human society because it draws upon insights from the foundational sciences such

as biology, chemistry, and physics. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding social order, social change, and the factors that shape human interaction.

The Evolution of Scientific Knowledge Leading to Sociology

Comte's hierarchy of sciences posits that disciplines progress from simpler, more general fields to more complex and specialized ones. Mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology each build upon the insights of their predecessors. Sociology, as the final science, incorporates and transcends these fields to study the most intricate and dynamic subject: human society. The progression toward sociology mirrors Comte's "Law of Three Stages," where human thought evolves from the theological to the metaphysical and finally to the positive (scientific) stage. Just as society evolves through these stages, scientific inquiry culminates in sociology's ability to adopt a positive approach to social phenomena.

Comte believed that without sociology, human knowledge would remain fragmented and incomplete. The lower-order sciences, while essential for understanding natural phenomena, could not account for the complexities of social life. Sociology's task was to synthesize insights from these fields and provide a holistic understanding of human interactions, institutions, and social structures.

Sociology as a Distinct Scientific Discipline

One of Comte's key contributions to the development of sociology was his insistence that it should be a science distinct from other disciplines. While it borrowed methods and insights from biology and other natural sciences, sociology needed its own theoretical frameworks and methodological tools to study social phenomena comprehensively. Comte envisioned sociology as both a theoretical and applied science, capable of generating knowledge and informing practical solutions for social problems.

To achieve this, Comte proposed two primary branches of sociology: social statics and social dynamics. Social statics focused on the study of social structures and the conditions that maintain social order, while social dynamics examined the processes of social change and development. Together, these branches provided a comprehensive framework for understanding both stability and transformation in societies.

Sociology's Dependency on Other Sciences

In Comte's hierarchy, each science depends on the knowledge and methods of those that precede it. Sociology's reliance on biology is particularly significant, as Comte believed that understanding human social behavior required an understanding of biological processes. For example, human instincts, emotions, and physical needs

influence social interactions and institutional structures. Similarly, chemistry and physics contribute insights into the material conditions that shape human societies, such as environmental factors and technological advancements.

Despite this dependency, Comte was clear that sociology could not be reduced to biology or any other science. While it drew upon these disciplines, sociology's subject matter—human society—was distinct and required unique methods of investigation. This distinction underscored Comte's belief in the autonomy and scientific legitimacy of sociology.

The Methodological Foundations of Sociology

Comte's vision for sociology included a rigorous methodological foundation. He believed that sociology should adopt the empirical and systematic methods of the natural sciences while adapting them to the complexities of social phenomena. Observation, experimentation, and comparative analysis were essential tools for sociologists, but they had to be applied in ways that accounted for the unique characteristics of social life.

One of Comte's methodological innovations was the historical method, which involved analyzing the development of societies over time to identify patterns and laws of social change. This approach was consistent with his belief in the progressive evolution of human knowledge and social organization. By studying history, sociologists could understand the factors that shaped contemporary societies and predict future developments.

Sociology as a Tool for Social Progress

Comte's vision for sociology was not merely academic; it was deeply rooted in his desire to promote social progress. He believed that a scientific understanding of society could help address social problems and guide the development of a more harmonious and stable social order. Sociology, as the "crowning science," was essential for this task because it provided the knowledge necessary to design and implement effective social policies.

Comte's emphasis on social progress was closely linked to his philosophy of positivism, which rejected speculative metaphysics in favor of empirical observation and scientific reasoning. Positivism sought to establish a rational basis for knowledge and social organization, and sociology was its most advanced expression. By applying scientific principles to the study of society, sociologists could contribute to the betterment of humanity.

The Ethical Dimension of Sociology

In addition to its scientific and practical roles, Comte envisioned sociology as having an ethical dimension. He believed that sociologists had a responsibility to promote social cohesion and moral order. This ethical aspect was reflected in his concept of the “Religion of Humanity,” which sought to replace traditional religious beliefs with a secular, scientific moral system. Sociology, as the study of social life, was central to this vision because it provided the knowledge needed to foster solidarity and cooperation among individuals.

Comte’s ethical vision for sociology also emphasized the importance of altruism and collective well-being. He believed that scientific knowledge should be used not for individual gain but for the benefit of society as a whole. This perspective aligned with his broader philosophical commitment to social harmony and progress.

9.7 Critiques and Legacy of Comte’s Vision

While Comte’s classification of sciences and his vision for sociology were ground breaking, they have also been subject to criticism. Some scholars argue that his rigid hierarchy of sciences oversimplifies the relationships between disciplines and fails to account for the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of modern scientific inquiry. Others question the applicability of his methodological principles to the study of complex social phenomena.

Despite these critiques, Comte’s contributions to sociology and the philosophy of science remain significant. His emphasis on the scientific study of society laid the groundwork for the development of sociology as an academic discipline. His ideas continue to influence sociological thought, particularly in areas such as social theory, research methodology, and the relationship between science and society.

9.8 Conclusion

Comte’s vision for sociology as the “crowning science” underscores its importance in synthesizing knowledge from other disciplines and addressing the complexities of human society. By establishing sociology as a distinct and rigorous science, Comte provided a framework for understanding social life that continues to shape the field today. His emphasis on empirical observation, historical analysis, and ethical

responsibility remains relevant as sociologists seek to understand and address the challenges of contemporary society.

Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences remains a seminal contribution to the philosophy of science, emphasizing the cumulative and interconnected nature of human knowledge. By arranging the sciences in a systematic sequence based on their complexity and dependence, Comte demonstrated the evolving sophistication of intellectual inquiry. Each science builds upon the foundations laid by its predecessors, culminating in sociology as the most complex and socially relevant discipline.

This hierarchical classification underscores the gradual progression from studying the simplest phenomena to understanding the intricate dynamics of human society. Comte's belief in sociology as the "crowning science" highlights its critical role in addressing societal challenges through empirical and objective inquiry. Furthermore, his vision underscores the importance of integrating insights from natural and physical sciences to better comprehend social realities.

The relevance of Comte's framework endures, particularly in interdisciplinary research, where the lines between sciences are increasingly blurred. The principles embedded in the hierarchy encourage scholars to appreciate the interconnectedness of knowledge and to pursue scientific endeavors that advance understanding across diverse fields.

9.9 Summary

This unit delves into Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences, a foundational concept in the philosophy of science that classifies disciplines based on their complexity and interdependence. Beginning with mathematics, the most fundamental and abstract science, the hierarchy progresses through astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology, culminating in sociology. Comte's classification reflects his belief that scientific knowledge evolves in a sequential and cumulative manner, with each discipline building on the insights of its predecessors.

The discussion highlights how each science contributes to a broader understanding of the natural and social world. Mathematics provides the quantitative tools necessary for scientific inquiry, while astronomy, physics, and chemistry explore the physical properties of the universe. Biology introduces the study of living organisms, marking a significant step toward greater complexity. Sociology, at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, synthesizes knowledge from all previous sciences to study human society and social behaviour.

Comte's vision for sociology as the "crowning science" underscores its importance in addressing societal challenges and understanding the dynamics of social structures. By applying the scientific method to social phenomena, sociology provides a rigorous and objective framework for analyzing complex social issues. The hierarchical framework thus remains a valuable model for understanding the interconnectedness of scientific disciplines and the cumulative nature of knowledge.

9.10 Questions

Short Questions

1. What is Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences?
2. Why did Comte place mathematics at the base of the hierarchy?
3. How does chemistry differ from physics in Comte's classification?
4. Why is biology considered more complex than chemistry in Comte's hierarchy?
5. What role does sociology play in Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences?

Long Questions

1. Explain the sequential and cumulative nature of Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences.
2. Analyze the relationship between biology and sociology in Comte's classification.
3. Discuss the relevance of Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences in contemporary interdisciplinary research.
4. How does Comte justify the placement of sociology as the "crowning science"?
5. Critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of Comte's Hierarchy of Sciences.

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9.12 Glossary

1. **Sociology:** The scientific study of society, social institutions, and human interactions, focused on analyzing social phenomena and structures.
2. **Hierarchy of Sciences:** A classification system in social thought that emphasizes the interdependence and progression of scientific disciplines.
3. **Positivism:** A philosophical approach that emphasizes the use of scientific methods to study observable phenomena, advocating for empirical research over metaphysical speculation.
4. **Mathematics:** The most abstract and foundational science, providing quantitative tools for other disciplines.
5. **Astronomy:** A science concerned with the study of celestial objects and phenomena, often linked with early systematic scientific observations.
6. **Physics:** The branch of science that deals with the properties and interactions of matter and energy.
7. **Chemistry:** A science focused on the composition, properties, and transformations of substances.
8. **Biology:** The study of living organisms and life processes, considered a foundational science for understanding social and environmental dynamics.
9. **Empirical Inquiry:** An approach to knowledge that relies on observation and experimentation rather than abstract reasoning or speculation.
10. **Cumulative Knowledge:** The concept that scientific knowledge builds progressively, with each discipline drawing upon the findings of its predecessors.
11. **Interdisciplinary Research:** A research approach that integrates methods, theories, and concepts from multiple disciplines to address complex issues.

12. **Scientific Method:** A systematic process for conducting research and acquiring knowledge through observation, experimentation, and analysis.
13. **Superordination and Subordination:** Sociological terms used to describe relationships of hierarchy and authority within social structures.
14. **Social Phenomena:** Events or interactions that occur within human society and can be studied scientifically.
15. **Dialectical Thinking:** A method of analysis that explores contradictions and their resolution, often associated with critical inquiry in the social sciences.
16. **Social Geometry:** A concept from formal sociology that explores the spatial and relational dimensions of social interactions.
17. **Formal Sociology:** An approach developed by Georg Simmel that focuses on the forms and patterns of social relationships rather than their content.
18. **Natural Sciences:** Disciplines such as physics, chemistry, and biology that study natural phenomena through empirical methods.
19. **Social Sciences:** Disciplines such as sociology, economics, and political science that study human society and social behaviour.

MODULE - III
Karl Marx

Unit 10 □ Dialectical Materialism

Structure

- 10.1 Learning Objectives**
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10.1 Learning Objectives

Going through this Unit we shall be able to understand -

- The historical roots of dialectical materialism
- Hegel’s contribution to the dialectic
- The distinction between idealism and realism
- Marx’s views on the dialectic
- Engels’ contribution in developing the notion
- Contributions made by subsequent thinkers

10.2 Introduction

The word ‘dialectic’ is derived from the Greek word ‘dialego’ which means to discourse, or to debate. It has several classical connotations. In Plato’s writings, dialectic is a highly valued vehicle for truth; it is akin to dialogue and closely associated with the Socratic method. Aristotle believed that dialectic was an inferior form of reasoning, as it was based on a priori knowledge rather than empirical observation. Cicero associated dialectic with rhetoric.

In modern times, dialectic has been vital within the German philosophical tradition beginning with Kant. His definition of dialectic, which is closely related to that of Aristotle, involves illusory knowledge that is reminiscent of sophistry. Originally (in Greek philosophy), dialectics was the art of knowing truth by uncovering the contradictions in reasoning of one’s adversary. The general medieval use of the term was to refer to formal reasoning. With the development of German idealism in the 19th century dialectics, became extended to refer not just to contradictions in discussion but to contradictions in reality. It is with Hegel, however, that the modern notion of dialectic crystallized. While the dialectic forms the key idea in Hegel’s philosophy, Engels credited Heraclitus with its origin. It was Hegel however who offered a systematic exposition of the concept.

It may be noted that in ancient times, the term ‘dialectic’ was widely used by Sophists and other Greek philosophers, but not in a manner of demonstrating or discovering new truths. It was mostly used to denote a method of disputation where the primary aim was to disprove a speaker by demonstrating that his statements were self-refuting. It was used in the court-room, public gatherings and the like.

10.3 George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel [1770-1831] was a noted German philosopher, born in Stuttgart. He was the son of a civil servant and most of his relatives were either teachers or Lutheran ministers. A brilliant student as he was, he won a scholarship to a reputed seminary at Tübingen in 1788 where he studied philosophy and theology. Thereafter, he took up the positions of tutoring which he gave up after his father’s death, and took to writing. Subsequently, consecutively, he held positions as university lecturer, a newspaper editor, headmaster of a high school and finally professor of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg.

Hegel's ideas dominated German philosophy for much of the nineteenth century and influenced western thought for even longer. He is noted as the founder of modern idealism and had greatly influenced modern political thought. The academic community in Germany at the time came to be divided amongst Hegelians, Left Hegelians and Right Hegelians. He formulated the theories of dialectic and self-realization. Hegel's important publications include *Phenomenology of Mind*, *Philosophy of Right*, *Lectures in the Philosophy of History*, *Lecture on Aesthetics*, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

10.4 The Dialectics – Hegel's Formulation

Central to Hegel's theory was the notion of the dialectics. His use of the dialectical method originated with his identification of Kantian critical theory which involved rejection of the Enlightenment philosophical method based on the scientific approach of studying nature. He was also influenced by the ideas of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus. Heraclitus taught that everything was constantly changing and that all things consisted of two opposite elements which changed into each other as night changes into day, light into darkness, life into death etc.

For Hegel, dialectics was 'the only true method' for comprehending pure thought. While in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, published in 1807, Hegel gave an example of the use of the dialectic in human consciousness a more comprehensive political use was found in the *Philosophy of Right* published in 1821, where the dialectical process reflected the evolution of world history from the Greek world to Hegel's time.

He argued that all reasoning was dialectical. From a concept emerges its negation which in turn gives birth to a new concept, transcending the earlier concept. It is through such dialectical process that a definite reality is gradually 'determined'. Reality itself is seen as the structure of thought and as such All processes in the world, whether in nature or human history, were believed to progress all the dialectical path.

In Hegelian thought dialectics applied to the process, evolution and development of history. In his vision, history was a progressive manifestation of human reason, and development of the historical spirit.

In Hegel's vision, thus, there was a dialectical pattern in history. Hegel viewed human history as a sort of growing up of the Mind, modeled on stages of human development, with a succession of civilizations representing the different stages. In each civilization the Spirit or the Mind objectifies itself, expressing itself in the form of social life,

morality, politics, science, art, religion and philosophy. In Hegel's vision, the entire process reached its pinnacle in the German state of his day. He saw the Prussian state as the highest possible achievement of the Mind as expressed in social life, Protestantism the highest expression of religion, Romanticism as the highest perfection of art; and, all these, in their different ways reflected the full maturity of the Spirit. He saw development in evolutionary terms – the final phase of any development summing up and holding together all previous phases in a synthesis. His notion of the fully developed state was thus a complex dialectical synthesis of the different levels of social life – the family, civil society and the state. To him, the state represented the ultimate body, highly complex, formed as a result of a synthesis of contradictory elements at different levels of social life.

To Hegel, dialectics described both the relation between premises and conclusions in a logical argument, and also the process of historical development in reality. The essence of the dialectical movement was 'the negation of the negation', whereby truth is approached by the successive generation of the negation of each concept postulated in an attempt to capture it; history proceeds through dialectical contradictions in action. Through the resolution of the contradictions, the Spirit attains a 'lifting up' [Aufhebung] to a higher level.

The historical process, in Hegel's view was marked by two kinds of causation. First, there was the individual spirit desirous of happiness and providing energy. Second, the world spirit which strove for higher freedom, that could be attained through knowledge of the self. Hegel believed, without each individual pursuing his own goals nothing could be achieved in history. But, to know whether these actions were in conformity with the dialectic of the universal, 'the cunning of reason' played its role by allowing passions to run their full course.

10.5 Marx, Engels And The Emergence of Dialectical Materialism

Karl Marx was born in a Jewish family in Trier in Rhineland in Germany in 1818. His father, Heinrich was a rabbi. They later converted to the Lutheran order. Marx studied law at the universities of Bonn and Berlin. Then, under the influence of the young Hegelians, changed his course to philosophy. He did his doctorate in philosophy in 1841. From 1842-48 Marx edited radical publications. In 1848, together with Engels, he helped in the founding of the Communist League. He was a philosopher,

economist, historian, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and socialist revolutionary all in one. His works inspired the foundation of many communist movements and regimes across the world in the twentieth century.

The influence of Hegel's thought in Marx's early writings [e.g. *The 1844 Manuscripts*] was particularly prominent. Marx, in line with Hegel, continued to believe, that the dialectic was a powerful logical method uniquely capable of demonstrating a law of social development, and in consequence his philosophy was, like that of Hegel, a philosophy of history. However, unlike Hegel Marx construed his philosophy as a form of materialism. Further, for both Marx and Hegel, the driving force of social change is struggle and the determining factor, in the last resort is power. The struggle, for Marx is between social classes and the power is economic rather than political; political power being a consequence of economic position. Marx shared with Hegel a profound skepticism about the ability of human foresight or intentions to modify the action of social forces.

Friedrich Engels, born in 1820, came from a rich Protestant family in Rhineland. When he met Marx he was already making a name for himself as a talented radical journalist. He became a lifelong friend and collaborator of Marx. He himself contributed significantly towards the development of the Marxian formulations, and influenced Marx profoundly by drawing attention to the problems of political economy. He convinced Marx that the future lay in industrialization, and that classical economics had to be mastered in order to understand how that future would unfold. It is in Engels' late work *Anti-Dühring* that the dialectical method is extended beyond the description of human actions and institutions to the explanation of physical reality. Engels' dialectical philosophy was further developed in his posthumously published volume *Dialectics of Nature*. It may be noted that, in response to criticism of Marx's ideas by a socialist named Eugen Dühring, Engels published several articles that were collected under the title *Herr Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* (1878; *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, better known as *Anti-Dühring*), and an unfinished work, *Dialektik und Natur* (*Dialectics of Nature*), which he had begun around 1875–76.

Marx never wrote a text on dialectics or even used the term "dialectical materialism". Articulating Marx's dialectic was a task undertaken by Engels and those who followed. There are, as a result, a great many debates about what exactly dialectical materialism is. There has also been a tendency to oversimplify dialectical materialism into a mechanical and deterministic dogma.

In his work, *Dialectics of Nature*, Friedrich Engels that applied the ideas of dialectical materialism to science. Engels wrote most of the manuscript of the *Dialectics of Nature* between 1872 and 1882. However, it was not published within his lifetime. Engels's notebooks on "dialectics" were published in 1927 as *Dialectics of Nature*. Dialectical materialism (or "dialectics" or *diamat*) was thus said by the 1930s to be the master doctrine of Marxism. The formulation of the Soviet version of dialectical and historical materialism in the 1930s by Joseph Stalin and his associates (such as in Stalin's book *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*), became the official Soviet interpretation of Marxism.

Overall Dialectical Materialism was a doctrine of "becoming" rather than "being" in a fixed and static sense, and one that emphasized development and progress through contradictions, whether in logical relations or in political struggles; the world was not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made *things* but as a complex of *processes*.

In their totality, the ideas of Marx and Engels provide an elaborate worked-out theoretical basis for the struggle of the working class to attain a higher form of human society - socialism. Scientific socialism or Marxism is composed of three component parts: Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism and Marxist Economics.

Dialectical Materialism developed in Europe, based on the writings of Marx and Engels. It forms the theoretical foundation of Marxism. Put simply, it combines the concepts of Dialectics and Materialism. The term was coined in 1887 by Joseph Dietzgen, a socialist who corresponded with Marx, during and after the failed 1848 German Revolution. Casual mention of the term "dialectical materialism" is also found in the biography *Frederick Engels*, by philosopher Karl Kautsky, written in the same year. Marx himself had talked about the "materialist conception of history", which was later referred to as "historical materialism" by Engels. Engels further explained the "materialist dialectic" in his *Dialectics of Nature* in 1883. Georgi Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, first used the term "dialectical materialism" in 1901 in his writings on Hegel and Marx. Today the term is widely used to refer to Engels' own version of the theory as expounded in his posthumously published work, *Dialectics of Nature* [1925].

Marx and Engels had, in their youth, been associated with the Young Hegelians. The Young Hegelians were a group of German intellectuals who, in the decade or so after the death of Hegel in 1831, reacted to and wrote about his legacy. They drew on his idea that the purpose and promise of history was the total negation of everything conducive to restricting freedom and reason; and they proceeded to mount radical

critiques, first of religion and then of the Prussian political system. The influence of Hegel's ideas on Marx and Engels were, at the point, significant.

10.6 Marx's Contribution to Dialectical Materialism

Marx's dialectic is intrinsic to Marx's methodology. Marx transformed dialectical thinking into a critical tool. His development of dialectics grew out of his critique of *Hegelian dialectics*. Marx developed a materialist scientific (as opposed to positivist scientific) use of dialectic. Marx substituted the economic rather than metaphysical to explain the historical process which he conceived as a struggle between classes (rather than a struggle between nations). Furthermore, Marx saw history as the result of practical reflective action (praxis) on the part of social groups or classes. The dialectical process of historical change inheres in the conflict that arises between active classes. It is pertinent to note that it was not the dialectic which Marx changed, but rather the metaphysical interpretation of it. The dialectic was a method and Marx retained the main outline of the Hegelian methodology.

The theory of Dialectical Materialism was worked out by Marx in a rather fragmentary manner. He combined the empirical and the deductive in dialectical materialism. Marx's first statements on dialectical materialism were made in his writings between 1844-1848 under the stimulus of Feuerbach's materialist interpretation of Hegel and following incidents in Marx's career as a revolutionary socialist. The term 'materialism' was used by Marx in a specialized sense, different from its uses by French scholars before him who used the term to refer to philosophy which was supposed to be dependent on physics and chemistry and which held mechanical explanations given by these sciences could be extended to all subject matters. Marx digressed from this position and in his work *Holy Family*, distinguished his materialism from the French materialism of the eighteenth century. And, for him, 'dialectical' was the essence of the matter. Perhaps his only summary statement on dialectical materialism can be found in the Preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*, as follows:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness..... At a certain stage of their development,

the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or.... With the property relations within which they had been at work before. ... then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.... No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. [George H. Sabine, revised by Thomas L. Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, OUP, New Delhi, pp. 698-9]

There were several implications of ‘materialism’ which were important to Marx. First, he tended to equate the word with ‘scientific’ . even though he did not believe that the social studies could imitate physics, he believed that they could be equally precise. Secondly, materialism implied for Marx a rejection of religion. Thirdly, materialism and the dialectic had for Marx the suggestion of a new and more far reaching revolution. Finally, for Marx materialism had an ethical meaning. The root of social inequality is economic and only by abolishing private ownership can any substantial change be made; and, through such a change the entire inequitable structure of society would be transformed at once.

Marx held that the structure of classes that exist in a society at any given period is itself a historical product which changes with the forces of economic production that the society is able to utilize.

10.7 Engels on Dialectic

While the dialectic was presumed in many of Marx’s writings, the statement of the theory was actually made by Engels in *Anti-Duhring*, written in 1878. In his words, “Dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought” [*Engels, Anti-Duhring, 1876-1878, MECW, Vol.25, p.131*]. he further proceeded to point out that “Motion is the mode of existence of matter...There is no matter without motion, nor could there ever have been.” [*Engels, Anti-Duhring, 1878 (First Ed), FLPH, Moscow, 1954, p.86; MECW, Vol.25, p.55*].

As pointed out by Engels in his *Feuerbach*, the major difference between Marx and Hegel lay in the fact that Marx adopted a materialist version of dialectic; ideas are not

forces, as proposed by Hegel, but ‘ pictures of real things’, the ‘conscious reflex of the dialectic evolution of the real world’. Engels pointed out in the Feurbach that what chiefly commended the dialectic to him and to Marx was its power as a solvent of dogmatism . in fact, it was this factor that made Hegelianism a revolutionary theory:

Truth, the cognition of which is the business of philosophy, became in the hands of Hegel no longer an aggregate of finished dogmatic statements, which once discovered had merely to be learned by heart. Truth lay now in the process of cognition itself, in the long historical development of science, which mounts from lower to ever higher levels of knowledge without ever reaching, by discovering so-called absolute truth, a point at which it can proceed no farther....

[George H. Sabine , revised by Thomas L. Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, OUP, New Delhi, p. 703]

10.8 The Essence of Dialectical Materialism

Dialectical approach is essentially a philosophical approach to reality derived from the teachings of Marx and Engels. It has been debated whether, Marx and Engels, or Engels alone developed the concept of Dialectical Materialism. Both Plekhanov and Lenin seemed to have based their analyses on Engels’ formulation, assuming that Marx and Engels held identical views .

Put briefly, dialectical materialism suggests that political and historical events result from the conflict of social forces and can be interpreted as a series of contradictions and their solutions. It seeks to explain the laws of evolution and change.

It states that all phenomena of the modern world are inextricably connected with one another; as such, any analysis of the material world or society would have to be considered as a whole, isolation of one from the other is impossible. Dialectics needs to be viewed both as a method—or a way of investigating, and understanding phenomena—and a fact of existence.

Hegel had used the concept of the dialectics to explain the movement of history, which to him was the movement of consciousness or the ‘spirit’ alone. This movement , he argued, would have to proceed according to the logical order of the dialectic. Marx claimed to have turned Hegel on his head. For Marx and Engels change was inherent in the nature of the material world. They therefore held that one could not,

as Hegel tried, deduce the actual course of events from any “principles of dialectics”; the principles must be inferred from the events.

Marx and Engels drew on a number of different intellectual strands and built up the combination which they called dialectical materialism. They took the dialectical method from Hegel, bringing it down from its idealist heights. Hegel’s emphasis on the growth of ideas and the spread of those ideas as an evolving culture or ethos was given economic emphasis. They discarded the anti-religious emphasis of philosophical materialism as was represented in the works of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and instead put in it the political economy of David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus. They also incorporated Rousseau’s original concerns with equality and freedom.

As it is, Marx and Engels were greatly influenced by Hegel’s dialectics. In their understanding of the general nature of dialectics, both Marx and Engels relied substantially on Hegel. For Engels, as for Hegel, the value of the dialectic was to be found in the fact that it permitted the discovery of a necessary evolution in history. However, while Hegel had described the movement of history as the movement of consciousness alone, Marx and Engels believed that consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness. Thus, while they agreed with Hegel that the movement of history was dialectical, they denied that it was spiritual. Because of this, it is referred to as ‘dialectical materialism’. Dialectical materialism holds that the world, including human beings, is “matter in motion” and that progress occurs through struggle. Thus, while Marx agreed with Hegel that human history tends to proceed along dialectical patterns, he believed that it is propelled not by an evolving Spirit of humanity, but by *economic forces*. And the conflicts in this particular dialectic are not between ideas or aspects of culture, solidarity versus individualism, but conflicts of opposing economic groups, of different classes.

In the Marxian frame, the general nature of dialectics is developed as the science of interconnections, in contrast to metaphysics. It is, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development, as well as of thought itself. And indeed they can be reduced in the main to three basic principles:

The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa;

The law of the interpenetration of opposites;

The law of the negation of the negation

All three were developed by Hegel in his idealist fashion as mere laws of thought. Engels noted that, as the dialectical laws are laws of development of nature, and therefore are valid also for theoretical natural science.

“Engels made constant use of the metaphysical insight that the higher level of existence emerges from and has its roots in the lower; that the higher level constitutes a new order of being with its irreducible laws; and that this process of evolutionary advance is governed by laws of development which reflect basic properties of ‘matter in motion as a whole’.”[Z. A. Jordan, *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Macmillan, 11067).]

The Dialectics has been thought to be fundamental to the Marxist theory of history and the Marxist method in all the human sciences. For Marx, however, the contradictions are to be found in material reality, and in thought only as a consequence of that reality. Dialectics explained the progress of history as generated by forces which contradict one another but which also grow from one another. In capitalism, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are generated; they grow in inter-linkage with one another and in fact cannot subsist without each other. Yet, they are in a relationship of constant irreconcilable conflict till the new order emerges from their revolutionary destruction.

Marx’s hypothesis was that inequality would grow with productivity till a quantum jump in the quality of technology would enable a condition of abundance rather than scarcity. But before that, conflict between the propertied and property-less would grow at an unprecedented rate. The very nature of capitalist productive process would create , along with its wealth and innovation, social contradictions and crisis. And, out of that crisis , the new solution, socialism would emerge. In the Marxian frame, the misery produced by capitalism was the stimulus for revolution, the potential source of mobilization against capitalist society.

10.9 Lenin on Dialectical Materialism

Lenin was also fascinated by the concept of the dialectics. He studied it both from Marx and Hegel and filled several notebooks with his reflections on it. In one of these writings he observed, the dialectics is ‘the idea of the universal, all sided, living connection of everything with everything, and the reflection of this connection in the conceptions of man.’ Lenin considered the Dialectics *to be* the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism. [Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, “On the Question of Dialectics”, 1915, *CW*, Vol.38, p.362

In the words of Lenin, “The application of materialist dialectics to the reshaping of all political economy from its foundation up, its application to history, natural science, philosophy and to the policy and tactics of the working class – that was what interested Marx and Engels most of all, that is where they contributed what was most essential and new, and that was what constituted the masterly advance they made in the history of revolutionary thought.” [*Lenin, The Marx-Engels Correspondence, 1913, CW, Vol.19, p.554*]

In a scathing criticism of idealist notion of dialectics, Lenin noted Philosophical idealism is only nonsense from the stand-point of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism. From the standpoint of dialectical materialism, on the other hand, philosophical idealism is a one-sided, exaggerated, development (inflation, distension) of one of the features, aspects, facets of knowledge, into an absolute, divorced from matter, from nature, [Lenin, Philosophical Notebooks, “On the Question of Dialectics”, 1915, CW, Vol.38, p.362]

Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism* discussed the dialectic, its relation to the natural and social sciences and to philosophical systems like materialism, idealism and scientific positivism. However, there was hardly any detailed explication of Lenin’s concern with the dialectic

10.10 Critiquing The Marxian Formulation

Karl Popper famously opposed Marxism in general and its philosophical core – the Marxist dialectic – in particular. Popper saw in dialectic a source of dogmatism damaging to philosophy and political theory. Popper had summarized his views on dialectic in an article that was first delivered in 1937 and subsequently republished as a chapter of his book (Popper, K. (2002) *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London: Routledge Classics pp. 411-451), where he accuses Marxist dialecticians of not tolerating criticism. However, Popper’s remark of how Marxist dialecticians dismiss any criticism of dialectic by claiming that their opponents do not understand dialectic makes his position no less dogmatic. According to Berry Groisman, ‘The dialectical approach certainly suffers from its apparent applicability to “everything”, the problem that raised the most serious objections from Popper. Indeed, it should be clarified how dialectic classifies and differentiates different processes and types of connections in the world.’

Dialectical materialism was debated and criticized by various Marxist philosophers as well, which led to a number of political and philosophical struggles in the Marxist movement in general and in the Comintern in particular. In 1937, Mao Zedong, in his essay *On Contradiction*, rejected Engels' "laws of dialectics" as oversimplified and insisted on the complexity of the contradiction. Mao's text inspired Louis Althusser's work on contradiction, which was a driving theme in his well-known essay *For Marx* (1965). Althusser attempted to nuance the Marxist concept of contradiction by borrowing the concept of "over-determination" from psychoanalysis. He criticized the Stalinist "teleological" reading of Marx as a return to Hegel's idealism in which philosophy supersedes reality. Another school of thought, led by Italian philosopher Ludovico Geymonat, constructed a "historical epistemology" from dialectical materialism. In 1950 Georg Lukács, the Hungarian Marxist, argued that the essence of Marx's project is not the correctness or incorrectness of his many theses, but rather, his dialectical *method*. Stressing the significance of Marx's method Lukács notes that it is a "weapon" of the proletariat and "an instrument of war".

Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, for example, proposed a "philosophy of praxis" in its place. Other thinkers in Marxist philosophy have pointed to the original texts of Marx and Engels, pointing out that traditional dialectical materialism was much more a product of Engels than of Marx. This has resulted in various "Marxist" philosophical projects which present alternatives to traditional dialectical materialism.

10.11 Conclusion

The dialectic has been an indispensable element of Marxism. Dialectical Materialism has provided the theoretical basis for a method of reasoning. Through it, Marxism presents itself as an opposite of a dogma. It sets forth a method for coming to grips with the processes of change; a mechanism for understanding the course of human history.

10.12 Summary

There is a huge body of philosophy and debate around dialectics and dialectical materialism, going back to the ancient Greeks. Even as the concept of the dialectic had been in usage in ancient Greek philosophy, in the hands of Hegel the notion acquired a unique and structured development as never seen before. Marx and Engels drew heavily on Hegel's formulation of the dialectics, but thoroughly transformed it to develop their concept of 'dialectical materialism'.

10.13 Questions

Broad questions

1. Examine Hegels' concept of dialectic.
2. Discuss Engels' contribution to Dialectical Materialism.
3. In what respect was dialectical materialism different from Hegel's dialectic? Examine.
6. Who were the Young Hegelians ?
7. What are the basic principles of dialectical materialism ?
8. Write briefly about the historical context of the emergence of dialectical materialism.

Short questions [6 marks each]

1. How did Hegel view the progress of history?
 2. What was Lenin's views on the dialectic ?
 3. Dialectic is both a method and an existence of fact. Explain.
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Unit 11 □ Historical Materialism

Structure

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11.1 Learning Objectives

Going through this Unit we shall be able to understand:

- The meaning of the materialist concept of history
- The historical context in which it developed
- The contributions made by Marx and Engels to the development of this conception
- The nature of subsequent contributions made in the field
- The nature of productive forces
- The pattern of relations of production

- What is class struggle?
- The significance of the dialectic in the course of evolution of history
- The significance of historical materialism

11.2 Introduction

How has human society evolved and under what compulsions, are questions that have for long been matters of intense curiosity, debate, discussion and varied interpretations. Different analytical tools and perspectives have enriched the field. Amongst them, significant contributions have been made by the Marxists. While the writings of Marx [1818-83] and Engels [1820-95] form the core of Marxism, the theoretical position has evolved over time with contributions made from diverse angles. Some of it has also undoubtedly led to debates and disagreements.

11.3 What is Historical Materialism?

Historical Materialism is an approach to history which asserts that the material conditions of a society's mode of production, or in Marxist terms, the union of a society's productive forces and relations of production, fundamentally determine society's organization and development. In essence, historical materialism rests on the premise that the ultimate source of human development is the development of the productive forces. These ideas were initiated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and subsequently further developed by their followers.

Historical materialism looks for the causes of developments and changes in human society in the means by which human beings collectively produce the necessities of life. It argues that social classes and the relationship between them, along with the political structures and ways of thinking in society, are founded on and reflect contemporary economic activities. It is believed to be a scientific approach to the study of society, sharply in contrast to utopian philosophical approaches.

Historical materialism is based upon a philosophy of human history. Yet, it is not, strictly speaking, a philosophy of history. It can better be understood as sociological theory of human progress.

In terms of the historical materialist analysis, human society is said to have passed through a series of stages that are clearly discernible. Each of the stages is based on a definite mode of production. That in turn expresses itself in a definite system

of class relations. These further manifest themselves in definite social outlook, psychology, morality, laws and religion.

Materialism is the basis of this sociological thought. For Marx and his followers, material conditions or economic factors affect the structure and development of society. In other words, 'Historical Materialism' is called 'materialist' because Marx has interpreted the evolution of societies in terms of their material or economic bases.

Further, the theory of historical materialism is considered to be 'historical' because it has traced the evolution of human societies from one stage to another, over time. It is suggested that all societies pass through processes of evolution; every society progresses stage by stage, from one to the other stage. The identified stages in the history of society, being the 'classless' primitive community, the slave-based society of classical times, the feudal society based on serfdom, the modern bourgeois society based on capitalism, socialism and lastly the advanced 'classless' society of the future, i.e. communist society.

The dialectical method was applied by Marx and Engels to the analysis of the material or social world comprising of economic production and exchange. Examination of the productive process was seen as the root to all other historical phenomena. Put simply, "historical materialism," also referred to as the materialist conception of history, is the Marxist interpretation of history in terms of the class struggle.

11.4 Marx on Historical Materialism

The "materialist conception of history" was first articulated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in *The German Ideology*, written around 1845-46. In *The German Ideology*, all the key elements of historical materialism are present. It was a work in which the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment was clearly discernible. In their writings, Marx and Engels stressed the importance of the division of labor and forms of property as the moving forces behind the development of societies. They criticized Enlightenment social philosophies for their mechanical cause-effect explanations and proposed instead a dialectical view of the development of human society. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels contrasted their new materialist method with the idealism that had characterised previous German thought. Accordingly, they took pains to set out the 'premises of the materialist method'.

It may be noted, however, that Marx did not set out his theory of history in great detail. As such, it is constructed from a variety of texts, both those where he attempts

to apply a theoretical analysis to past and future historical events, and those of a more purely theoretical nature.

Perhaps Marx's clearest formulation of historical materialism is to be found in his Preface to the 1859 book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* where he proceeds to state:

'The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'.

In the 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx clearly asserts that the actual basis of society is its economic structure. For Marx, economic structure of society is made of its relations of production. The legal and political super-structure of society is based on relations of production. Marx says that relations of production reflect the stage of society's forces of production. He noted that in critically evaluating Hegelian philosophy, he had discerned through his investigations that 'legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves, nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life....' At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, i.e. the property relations, within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters, thus begins an epoch of social revolution. As the economic foundation changes, Marx believed, the entire immense superstructure gets more or less rapidly transformed.

The course of history, as identified by Marx in broad outline, were based on Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production. The bourgeois relations of production were seen to be the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals; at the same time, the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation, Marx assumed, would bring the pre-history of human society to a close.

11.5 Contributions of Engels

Engels is believed to have coined the term *materialist conception of history* which was later abbreviated to historical materialism.

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels provides us with a rather developed expression of these ideas. Here we have a brilliant and concise exposition of the basic principles of historical materialism:

“The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in men’s better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange.”

As opposed to the utopian socialist ideas of Robert Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier, Marxism, it was argued by Engels, is based upon a scientific vision of socialism. Marxism explains that the key to the development of every society is the development of the productive forces: labour power, industry, agriculture, technique and science.

11.6 Lenin on Historical Materialism

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov [1870-1924], better known as Lenin , leader of the Bolsheviks during and after the Russian revolution and the primary architect of the Soviet Union, contributed significantly to the development of the Marxian theory, giving it dimensions which were in some cases debated as extensions, modifications and digressions of the original Marxist formulations. To Lenin, however, they were always seen as growing out of the exigencies of the practical application of the Marxian theory as developed by Marx. As such, he developed the notion of the vanguard party fighting the revolutionary class war. As such, he remained committed to the idea of historical materialism which he clearly asserted in his writings.

In *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* Lenin, in 1913, wrote ‘The philosophy of Marxism is *materialism*....Marx and Engels defended philosophical

materialism in the most determined manner and repeatedly explained how profoundly erroneous is every deviation from this basis.’ He went on to elaborate in the same work, ‘Marx deepened and developed philosophical materialism to the full, and extended the cognition of nature to include the cognition of *human society*. His *historical materialism* was a great achievement in scientific thinking. The chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious scientific theory, which shows how, in consequence of the growth of productive forces, out of one system of social life another and higher system develops—how capitalism, for instance, grows out of feudalism’.

11.7 Stalin’s Analysis

Joseph Stalin[1879-1953] ,asserting the relationship between Marx and Lenin’s ideas, stated in his work Foundations of Leninism [1924] that ‘Leninism is Marxism in the epoch of imperialism and the proletarian revolution.’ In ‘Dialectical and Historical Materialism’ [1938] Stalin described Historical materialism as ‘the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and of its history.’

Historical materialism, the fundamental tenet of Marxism in all its classical varieties, suggests that history is the product not of conscious decisions and ideas but of material processes and conditions which can be identified and described without reference to the mental states of those who participate in them. It is the changes in the material conditions that make changes in social, political and institutional superstructures possible. It is principally a theory of history which asserts that the material conditions of a society’s mode of production or in Marxist terms, the union of a society’s productive forces and relations of production, fundamentally determines society’s organization and development. In a world which is thus in a state of constant movement and development, where the dying away of the old and the emergence and growth of the new is a law of development, there can be no ‘immutable’ social systems or ‘eternal principles’ of private property and exploitation, no ‘eternal ideas’ of subjugation of the peasant to the landlord, of the worker to the capitalist. In the historical process, the feudal system gets replaced by the capitalist system and the subsequently the capitalist system gets replaced by the socialist system.

11.8 The Defining Elements of History

Marxism analyses the root factors that lie behind the development of human society, from the earliest primitive societies up to the modern day. The manner in which Marxism traces the course is referred to as the materialist conception of history. Here, history is not seen as a series of unconnected and unforeseen episodes; rather it is viewed as a clearly understood and interrelated process.

The progress of history can thus be clearly understood and analysed. It was seen by historical materialists as proceeding in a dialectical manner. **The dialectic** was used to explain the patterns of evolution and change; it suggested that political and historical events result from the conflict of social forces and can be interpreted as a series of contradictions and their solutions. In each of the stages of history, barring the final one, forces of contradiction made revolutions inevitable. The given status quo at any stage would be the thesis, with conflicts symptomatic of an anti-thesis operating and a solution emerging in the form of a synthesis. Thereafter, the synthesis would become the thesis and the process would continue till the attainment of a supposedly perfect society.

While describing the dialectical method, Marx and Engels usually referred to Hegel as the philosopher who formulated the main features of dialectics. But Marx and Engels were materialists, subscribing to historical materialism. Thus, even as they were immensely influenced by the Hegelian dialectic, in their usage of the ideas they transformed it significantly. On the other hand, while describing their materialism, Marx and Engels usually referred back to the German philosopher Feuerbach as the philosopher who restored materialism to its rights. Yet, Feuerbach's materialism too was critiqued by Marx, as in the opening line of 'The Theses on Feuerbach' he pointed out 'the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively.... Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really differentiated from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity.' Thus, even while Marx and Engels were referring to Hegel and Feuerbach and acknowledging their influences, they were not following paths that were identical with those of Hegel or Feuerbach.

In the evolution of history, historical materialism gave utmost importance to the productive forces. According to historical materialism, each generation inherits a mass

of **productive forces**. These comprise of an accumulation of capital, and a set of social relations that reflect the productive forces. The subsequent generation modifies these forces, though at the same time these forces prescribe certain forms of life and thought in distinct ways. As already noted, the modes of production and exchange were considered to be the ultimate cause of all social change and political revolution. That implied, that only with the change of society would minds or thought change. Historical materialism forms the basis of Marx and Engels' scientific socialism. It attempts to show that socialism and communism are scientific necessities rather than philosophical ideals, and would be attained in the course of the scientific unfolding of the laws of historical evolution.

The main force in the complex of conditions of material life of society which determines the character of the social system and the development of society from one system to another, is the method of procuring the means of livelihood, the mode of production of material values indispensable for the life and development of the society. The instruments of production whereby material values are produced, the people who operate the instruments of production and carry on the production of material values jointly constitute the productive forces of society. Thus, production, the mode of production, encompasses both the productive forces of society and men's relations of production.

The forces of production have an underlying dynamic of change which is the drive to reduce the amount of labour necessary to produce what is needed and wanted. Moreover, the development of the forces of production determines what kind of relations of production might be possible at any particular time. As Marx put it, by way of a suggestive example, "the windmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist".

Several vital features of the **process of production** may be noted. First, it never stays at one point for long; rather, it is always in a state of change and development and the changes in the mode of production inevitably call for changes in the entire social system, social ideas, political views and political institutions. Thus, they bring about a reconstruction of the whole social and political order. Secondly, the changes and development of production always begin with changes and development of the productive forces and, in the first place, with changes and development of the instruments of production. To start with, the productive forces change and develop; thereafter, depending on those changes and in conformity with them, relations of production change. Thirdly, it may be noted that the rise of the new productive forces and of the relations of production corresponding to them do not take place separately

from the old system after the disappearance of the latter; rather, it develops within the old system, not as a result of any deliberate or conscious activity of man, but spontaneously and independently of his will.

In the Marxian formulation, the **relations of production** refer to the socioeconomic relationships characteristic of a specific epoch; for example: a capitalist's exclusive relationship to a capital good, and a wage worker's consequent relation to the capitalist; a feudal lord's relationship to a fief, and the serf's consequent relation to the lord; a slavemaster's relationship to their slave; etc. The sum total of social relationships that people *must* enter into in order to survive, to produce, and to reproduce their means of life comprise the relations of production. As people *must* enter into these social relationships, i.e. because participation in them is not voluntary, the totality of these relationships constitute a relatively stable and permanent *structure*. They form the basis of the fundamental class conflict in society where the forces of production have enabled a surplus to be created which can then be appropriated by one group within society. The class conflict is the conflict between the direct producers and those who extract from the direct producers a surplus through exploitation.

In terms of historical materialism, the dynamics of social change rests on class conflict. **Class antagonisms** or **class struggles** were considered to be crucial to the working of all societies. In the oft quoted observation of Marx and Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' As such, they noted, 'freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another.' The basic elements in Marx's view of class conflict may be noted as follows:

- Classes are authority relationships based on property ownership.
- A class defines groupings of individuals with shared life situations, thus interests.
- Classes are naturally antagonistic by virtue of their interests.
- Imminent within modern society is the growth of two antagonistic classes and their struggle, which eventually absorbs all social relations.
- Political organization and Power is an instrumentality of class struggle, and reigning ideas are its reflection.
- Structural change is a consequence of the class struggle.

The emergence of class society was considered to be a revolutionary phenomenon. It freed a privileged section of the population, i.e. a ruling class, from the direct burden

of labour, thereby permitting it the necessary time to develop art, science and culture. The cultural and religious revolution reflected the great social revolution that brought about the dissolution of the primitive commune and established private property of the means of production.

11.9 The Different Stages of Human Society

The first period of human society which Marx and Engels identified was a period of primitive communism. It was characterised by an extremely low level of development of the means of production. Production was by stone tools and a hunter-gatherer mode of existence could be found. This hunter-gathering mode of production originally represented the universal condition of humankind. That stage was marked by the absence of private property. Further, classes in the modern sense were unknown. There was no state or organized religion and there was a deep sense of communal responsibility and sharing.

The prolonged period of **primitive communism**, humankind's earliest phase of development, where classes, private property, and the state did not exist, gave way to class society. As soon as people were able to produce a surplus above the needs of everyday survival, the division of society into classes became an economic feasibility.

In agriculture, the introduction of iron tools marked a big advance. It made for a growth in population and larger and stronger communities. Above all, it created a bigger surplus that could be appropriated by the dominant families in the community. In particular, the introduction of iron marked a qualitative change in the process of production, since iron is far more effective than copper or bronze, both for the making of tools and weapons. The coming of the system of private property led to the concentration of wealth and power into the hands of a minority.

In the 1850s Marx spoke of the **Asiatic mode of production**. In his articles on India written between 1852 and 1858 Marx outlined some of the basic characteristics of the Asiatic mode of production that prevailed in India. In these articles he indicated the absence of private ownership of land (self-sustaining units or communes), the unity between agriculture and manufacturing (handloom, spinning wheel), the absence of strong commodity production and exchange, and the stabilising role of Indian society and culture against invasions, conquests, and famines. The Asiatic Mode of Production did not lead to actual slave societies. Even though labour service was not

free, those who performed it were not slaves in the sense in which slaves could be found in Europe. It was in Europe that slave society came into existence.

The study of **feudal society**, its birth and its decline is central to Marxist historiography. Marx and Engels made “the feudal mode of production” one of the stages in their visionary reading of Western historical development; the feudal model followed “the ancient mode of production” and preceded capitalism, socialism, and communism. Feudalism (or more usually feudal society or the feudal mode of production) may be seen as the order coming before capitalism. For Marx, what defined feudalism was the power of the ruling class (the aristocracy) in their control of arable land, leading to a class society based upon the exploitation of the peasants who farmed those lands, typically under conditions of serfdom and principally by means of labour, produce and money rents.

The basis of feudalism was laid in Roman society. The slaves were freed but tied to the land and later became serfs. This process occurred at different times, assuming different forms in different countries.

The feudal system in Europe was mainly a decentralized system. The power of the monarchy was limited by the powers of the aristocracy. The central power was thus usually weak. The centre of gravity was that of the feudal lord; his power base was his manor and estate.

In course of time, feudalism came to be replaced by **capitalism**. The rise of the towns gradually undermined the old order. The new money economy, appearing at the margins of society, was eroding the foundations of the feudal economy. The old feudal restrictions were now seen as undesirable barriers to progress. In place of the feudal lords power now became concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The rise of the bourgeoisie in Italy, Holland, England and later in France was accompanied by a flourishing of culture, art and science.

In the epoch of the rise of the bourgeoisie, when capitalism still represented a progressive force in history, the first ideologists of that class had to fight a hard battle against the ideological bastions of feudalism, starting with the Catholic Church. Long before destroying the power of feudal landlords, the bourgeoisie had to break down the philosophical and religious defences mounted to protect the feudal system around the Church and its militant arm, the Inquisition.

The victory of capitalism in Europe laid the basis for a massive upswing of industry; and with it came the consolidation of that class, the proletariat, that was considered to be destined to overthrow capitalism and usher in a new and higher stage of social

development – **socialism**, leading ultimately to a communist society. Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*:

“A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.”

11.10 The Base and Superstructure

To get a grip of the concept of historical materialism it is important to make a distinction between “base” and “superstructure”. The ‘base’ refers to the processes of production of everything necessary for life in all its different aspects. The ‘superstructure’ on the other hand includes the state – which exists to stabilise the conditions of production and prevent revolt against them – and the ideology that is promoted to maintain the existing social arrangements.

Marx’s theory of base and superstructure and of the forces and relations of production which make up the base was elaborated both to explain change historically, and to explain how we best understand the possibilities of change in the future. It was aimed at imposing an order and understanding of the facts of history, to explain, both why the class struggle between the direct producers and their exploiters was central to the development of history, and how we can ultimately look to the direct producers taking control of society and planning production to meet the needs and the self-realisation of all.

11.11 The Revolution

In the Preface to the *Capital*, Marx stated that though one nation can learn from another, but ‘it can neither overleap the natural phases of evolution nor shuffle them out of the world by degrees.’ All that revolutionaries could do, according to Marx, would be ‘to shorten and lessen the birth pangs’ or make the ‘necessary’ transition to socialism as rapidly as possible. This implied that all societies must, by a natural law, pass through the stages of feudalism, capitalism and socialism and the transition in each case would result through a revolution. It also meant that, it is impossible to make a revolution by force or conspiracy before the time was ripe, that is before the contradictions in the society had produced a revolutionary situation. This distinguished Marx’s ‘Scientific Socialism’ from Utopianism or mere adventurism.

Revolution, for Marx was neither an insurrection nor coup. Rather, it was seen as the culmination of a lengthy evolutionary process within the existing society. But, in a capitalist society, political activity by the proletariat was considered essential; its growing class consciousness also meant a developing awareness of the bourgeoisie as both separate and antagonistic. And, from this, over time, socialist and revolutionary consciousness was to emerge. It appears that Marx and Engels had been of the opinion that the development of class consciousness would lead to the organization of the proletarians into a class, and thereafter a political party. It was through Lenin that the idea of the revolution and the role of the Party found elaborate formulation.

11.12 Criticisms of Historical Materialism

Historical materialism has faced criticisms from different angles. Critiques of historical materialism tend to be one of two types: either they are hostile attacks by anti-Marxists, intent on demonstrating the falsity, perniciousness or theoretical contradictions of Marxism; or else they are reconstructive critiques from within the Marxist tradition attempting to overcome what is perceived as theoretical weaknesses in the original Marxian formulation in order to advance the Marxist project.

Critics, referred to as revisionists in Marxist circles, have regarded historical materialism as outmoded and confusing. To others, historical materialism has represented a science of the laws of social development, as well as a method for studying the driving forces behind the evolution of societies.

Karl Popper, in *The Poverty of Historicism* and *Conjectures and Refutations*, critiqued the claims of the explanatory power or valid application of historical materialism by arguing that it could explain or explain away any fact brought before it, making it unfalsifiable and thus pseudoscientific. Similar arguments were brought by Leszek Ko³akowski in *Main Currents of Marxism*.

Neven Sesardic in “Marxian Utopia.” (1985), argued that historical materialism is a highly exaggerated claim. Sesardic observed that it was clear to many Marxists that the social, cultural and ideological superstructure of society was not under the control of the base but had at least some degree of autonomy. It was also clear that phenomena of the superstructure could determine part of the economic base.

Still others have pointed out that history has proved to be more complex than was predicted. On the one hand there were the realities of the situation whereby the socialist revolutions took place in states other than the highly industrialized ones

where they were expected to occur; on the other hand thereafter, the socialist states instead of moving towards communism seemed to go in reverse gear, moving back in the direction of capitalism.

Neo-Marxist trends evident in various currents in the twentieth century, perhaps starting with the work of Lukacs and continuing in the Frankfurt School, diverged from traditional Marxism in emphasizing not historical materialism, but the description of consciousness as the central component in Marx's social analysis. They did not see nation-states as societies having separate, yet parallel histories, but as parts of a single developing capitalist world economy.

11.13 Conclusion

In Historical Materialism, which formed the core of Marxist thinking, was embedded the critique of capitalism. But, it went much further as it presented an elaborate theoretical framework for analyzing the nature of societal evolution as a whole. It can be viewed as a general theory that was believed to be applicable for almost all societies. It emphasized the fact that understanding the dynamics of the present could only be achieved by looking into the past and understanding the processes of societal evolution over time where the superstructures of ideas, laws and politics were related to the prevailing economic systems. The fact that social systems are never static and transformations are ongoing realities which are greatly governed by the changes in the means of production and the nature of their control, remains Historical Materialism's significant and enduring contribution to the understanding of societies.

11.14 Summary

The Marxist theory of history claims an almost universal applicability. The focus is on production and reproduction of material social life, it is conceived primarily in terms of relationships between labour power and means of production. It is this which brings in the idea of 'materialism' in historical materialism. Human nature is socially located and constrained. Marx believed that in the course of evolution of human society, capitalism would inevitably move in the direction of communism and the decline of capitalism would be rooted in the crisis of over-production.

11.15 Questions

Broad questions

1. What according to Marxism are the root factors that lie behind the development of human society?
2. Discuss, from the perspective of historical materialism, the different stages through which human society is considered to evolve.
3. What were the contributions of Engels to the development of Historical Materialism?
4. What, according to Marxism, was the nature of primitive society?
5. Discuss the concept of productive forces.
6. Identify the features of the Asiatic mode of production.

Short questions

1. Explain the neo-Marxist position on historical materialism.
2. What, in the Marxian formulation, are the relations of production?
3. Explain Stalin's views on Historical Materialism.

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Unit 12 □ Capitalist Mode of Production

Structure

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12.1 Learning Objectives

This unit attempts to make the learners -

- Understand the meaning and significance of the capitalist mode of production in the history of human civilization.
- Understand the characteristics of capitalism
- Examine the crises of capitalism
- Understand the reasons behind the emergence of the proletariat
- Explain the revolutionary role of the proletariat in bringing down the capitalist mode of economic and social order.

12.2 Introduction

Karl Marx (1818-1863) is one of the most important and most influential theorists of modern time who explained the history of human civilization and political economy from a unique point of view. The most intellectually fertile period of his life was the years from 1843 to 1845 when he was looking for a scientific explanation to replace the popular religious arguments behind human civilization. For him, man is the true creator of history, and history progresses through stages; for each stage the form of the society is conditioned by the level of productivity and its need for growth. Marx explained that as a consequence of society's evolution and emergence of private property, two distinct classes appeared – one who owned property and the other who had to remain deprived of any such right. The first one was the ruthless exploiter of the latter; however, that exploitation could continue for ages without any need for coercion because of the ruling class's control over the ideology accepted by the members of the society in general. Engels has commented in his short book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) that two of Marx's greatest contributions are firstly, materialistic interpretation of history and secondly, unearthing of the secrets of capitalistic system of production. Ken Morrison has commented (2006) that Marx's economic writings are the most significant of all his contributions to the social and economic thought. The starting point of Marxian philosophy is undoubtedly capitalism; he formulated his economic theory of material development of society as an outline for his explanation of capitalism. Later, he published his ideas on the role of economy in a three volume work titled *Das Capital*. From his detailed discussion we can say that capitalism is a social system based on the exploitation of wage labour by capitalists who own and control the whole system of means of production. From this argument we find three important aspects of capitalism, such as, capitalism leads to severe exploitation; the ownership of the means of production remains concentrated in the hands of the exploitative bourgeois class that constitutes a very small but very powerful section of the society while the majority of the people remain deprived of both the ownership and control of capital and other means of production. The capitalist- owner brings elements like capital, labor and means of production under one single system to produce commodity. It is a by-product of scientific discoveries and industrial revolution in the west.

12.3 Meaning and Nature of Capitalism: Marxist View

Capitalism is a system of production in which capital becomes the principal aid in production of commodities for profit; it brought the tradition of natural economy of the earlier ages to an end. Capital includes cash (money), tools and machines needed in production, labour power and things that can be used to gain access to it or commodities that are deemed essential for production, even the store house of produced goods. Whatever may be the form of the capital, its primary purpose is concentration of its ownership in the hands of a few only by denying its access to others. It may be described as a distinct form of socio-economic supremacy of capital and of those who own it at a certain phase of history. The Dictionary of Scientific Communism (p.23) has defined capitalism as “a social system based on the exploitation of wage labour by capitalists, in whose hands the means of production are concentrated as their property.” It further means that this theory describes how a small group of people owns and controls the means of production while the majority sell their labor power to the owners. In Marxist parlance, the owners of the productive capital are known as the capitalists and the working masses are recognized as the proletariats.

The capitalist mode of production, as explained by Marx, has several distinct features of its own. These are: (1) private ownership of the means of production machineries, tools, raw materials, profits, etc. Even the labor power remains in the control of the owners of the capitals, that is, the capitalists. (2) Wage based labor system in which workers merely earn their wages in exchange of their hard labor and do not enjoy any right over the produce or in the profit. (3) Surplus Value or the difference between the economic value of the work the workers do and the wages they are paid. (4) class –struggle, which is an inherent part of the clash of interests between the workers and the capitalists. In this mode of production capital plays the most dominant role. Though the concept of capitalism is almost synonymous with the Marxist thought Marx did not use the term very often, instead he preferred to use the then popular term ‘bourgeoisie’; even in his discussions on capitalist society, use of capital, the nature of its movement and private property, there was no application of the term ‘capitalism’.

As a concept, capitalism has been examined from different angles by different thinkers; some consider it as an expression of dominance of capital over socio- politico-cultural elements at a particular stage of history; some others support it as an effort to spread rational thoughts and beliefs in society to weed out the narrow irrationalities of the

feudalistic middle ages. Again, in the opinion of some other thinkers capitalism is a tool to generate changes in ideology and mode of production such as, free economy, liberal state system, equal rights, liberal democracy and so on. It has also been associated with concepts of exploitation, unpaid labor, alienation of workers, oligarchical rule, etc. In *Capital* (Das Kapital 1867-1894) Marx proposed that production, not trade and commerce, was at the root of emergence and decline of capitalist production and it “is the first system in history to be based on the constant revolutionary changes in economic relations;...” (A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, 1991, 66). The other essential conditions of it are, a reserve army of unemployed people, a tendency towards concentration of capital in the hands of a few and a perennial presence of economic crises within the system leading to a conflict between labour and capital. As Marx has observed it, industrialization, establishment of manufacturing industries and progress of capitalism are all tied in closely. According to him, capitalism, with its factory system and revolutionary changes in agriculture has extended and altered the nature of production in all the other branches of industry. This may sound good for the economy but the system is extremely exploitative of the workers in the highest interests of owners of the capital; in the early years of capitalistic production workers were often treated as unskilled and were paid minimum wages. All of them including women and children were forced to work in unhealthy condition and any protest used to be met with dismissal. Marx has correctly observed in *Capital* (Vol.1, p. 403) that though the purpose behind the use of machinery was increasing the productiveness of labour by shortening the working hour needed for the production of a commodity, in the hands of capital it became the most powerful means to prolong the working day beyond all bounds set by human nature. Thus, mechanization helps the growth of production in a double way: firstly, it reduces the cost of production and enhances the volume of products and secondly, it prolongs the working day, in most of the cases, without any increase in wages. It also brings in radical changes in the methods of labour and places workers at the mercy of the capitalist. On the one hand, machinery removes all moral and natural restrictions on the working day and on the other, it places workers at the mercy of the capitalist.

12.4 Origin and Development of Capitalism

From the standpoint of historical materialism both the rise and fall of capitalism as a social system was inevitable. The monetary economy replaced the old barter (exchange) system giving rise to mercantile capital. Trade and commerce developed at a rapid

pace. Metallurgical production, textile manufacture, navigation, armaments, clock-making, astronomical instruments, invention of printing press gave a mighty impetus to the growth of manufacturing industry and new business ventures. Rapid and extensive growth of mercantile capital and industrial production accelerated the disintegration of medieval economy (Das. 1995. p.659).

Both Marx and Engels have stated in their writings that capitalism had first originated out of the feudalistic social system. In Communist Manifesto they discussed about the emergence and growth of the bourgeoisie. They have shown how capitalism has emerged out of the bourgeois class and how feudalism had been pushed out of existence by its force. Both the thinkers have observed in the Communist Manifesto that free urban citizenry did emerge, for the first time, out of the serfs of the medieval period; then from amongst them the primary characteristics of the bourgeois class started to appear. Since the discovery and colonization of America and Africa and capturing of markets in China and India production of goods and their marketing received a big boost. The whole system was assisted by import of costly minerals and other raw materials from the colonies at a cheap rate, rapid expansion of industrial production, establishment of worldwide markets, use of steam ships or rail roads to carry products to distant places brought in tremendous development for the economy of several European countries and that, in turn, helped develop both the bourgeoisie and its capital.

In his book *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) Marx clarifies that “it has been sufficiently proved that the increase in the means of exchange resulted, on the one hand, in a reduction of wages and rent, and on the other hand, in an increase in industrial profits. In other words, to the extent that the land owners and workers, the feudal lords and the common people, fell, so the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, rose.” (*Poverty of Philosophy*, quoted in Bottomore and Rubel, 1973. P.138). As feudalism started to wane due to growing popularity of industry the office bearers and serfs under the feudal system started to lose their job and relevance; therefore, huge number of people gradually started to crowd the streets of cities in search of employment. In Marx’s opinion, there were several historical conditions for the establishment of manufacture, such as, expansion of market, accumulation of capital, changes in the social position of different classes, severe unemployment, etc. In the editorial section of the first English edition of ‘*Capital*’ Engels states that there are two very important yet different periods in the history of man’s economic life— one is the period of manual production and the other is the period of modern industrial production. The age of manual production was in fact a better version of the period of traditional

crafts by artisans; skilled craftsmen and artisans used to come together to improve the production capacity of labour. Despite their skills and awareness about the importance of their skill, these artisans and craftsmen did not develop any consciousness about their own class and class condition as they had conservative ideas about their traditional craft and trade; also they did not feel any urge to modernize their trade or techniques of production. Such conservative tendencies started to face serious challenges when industrial revolution swept the traditional manufacturing techniques away with the introduction of advanced technology, machine based production, scientific approach and various innovative measures. Use of machine tools not only not only enhanced the production capability of the workers, it also reduced the cost of production and enriched capital. Marx himself has mentioned in the first volume of Capital that “The circulation of commodities is the starting point of capital. The production of commodities, their circulation, and the more developed form of their circulation called commerce, these form the theoretical groundwork from which it rises.”(Capital, Vol.1, Part II, P.145). The impact of industrialization was so massive that by the 19th century period, even the memory of the connection between agricultural labourers and the communal property was completely lost. The farmers ousted of their land and occupation turned into jobless paupers and vagabonds; the laws of the land compelled these jobless peasants to work hard in factories for a pittance, even children were not spared. In Chapter XXVII, Vol. I of Capital Marx observes that “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.” Both Marx and Engels observed that the huge changes in commerce that occurred in the 16th-17th centuries, the geographical discoveries and conquest of new lands for larger commercial activities were primarily responsible for the transition from agricultural to capitalist mode of production. The discovery of gold mines at California and Australia expanded England’s global share of market manifold; the machine –run textile mills of Lancashire succeeded in the destruction of handlooms of India, a lucrative market in China opened for the western powers in general and for the British in particular. Establishment of easy and faster postal communication, roadways, railways and naval connection made international trade and commerce easier for England other powerful countries of the west.

Both Marx and Engels have made it clear that capitalism did not come into existence overnight, it was the outcome of a long -term social and economic evolution to

change the old order and in the process it also changed the mode of production and the old system of exchange. The manufacturing industries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries helped the progress of industrial capitalism. The whole system has also been facilitated by the political control and authority of the bourgeois class who replaced the old order of feudal and aristocratic predominance with bourgeois social and political system. The political control and supremacy gained ground through the three centuries preceding the 20th century, that is, the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, when the principles of social and political democracy gained ground. Movements like Renaissance, Reformation not only introduced social-political changes, but also brought the authority of the Church and Pope to an end with the help of the now powerful merchants and capital owners. Support to Parliamentary democracy, voting right, rational thinking, freedom of choice and opinion, free competition for market share, etc. encouraged and strengthened the capitalistic mode of production.

Both Marx and Engels could see that capitalism reached a new stage in its evolutionary journey in the last half of the nineteenth century when free competition was replaced by monopoly capitalism. Big capitalists, trusts, business cartels, syndicates and similar other agencies captured the market during that phase. Lenin described this phase as imperialism; its main characteristics were high level of centralization of production system and capital, creation of finance capital by combining personal finance and bank finance, export of capital for higher profit, informal mutual distribution of global territory among the capitalist powers by creating monopoly business alliance. At the last phase, this mutual understanding gave way to fierce competition among the capitalists themselves for securing monopoly right over the world market that inevitably resulted in warfare. Marx, Engels and their followers believed in the power of the proletariat and so they were sure that in future both the capitalist mode of production and capitalist social system would be replaced first by socialist economy and socialist state system and finally by stateless, egalitarian communist system of society.

12.5 Characteristics of Capitalist Mode of Production

Capitalism has several important features that have given it a unique character. These features need careful consideration for understanding the true nature of this particular mode of production and its larger impact on the whole of the society. Marx and Engels identified the characteristics of capitalism in many of their writings not for any theoretical or philosophical purpose but to expose the true nature of inhuman

system behind the society's problems and crises. Engels' *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (1844), *Principles of Communism* (1847) contain a discussion on private ownership and the dominance of capital; then in Marx's *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* (1844), *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), *Principles of Communism*, *Wages, Price and Profit* (1865), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), *Capital and Communist Manifesto* – a booklet written by Marx and Engels together elaborate discussions on capitalism can be found. From their analysis we can see that capitalism is not static, it has evolved and transformed itself with time and it should be understood in the context of its changing, evolving nature. The first and foremost characteristic of capitalism is it is economic in nature. We should now consider its other characteristics.

1. Capitalist mode of production is characterized by private ownership over the means of production and production for profit. The classical thinkers of capitalism believe that in a state controlled system proper advancement of science and technology is not possible, so, for technological and related industrial progression, a society needs to be free of state control. Then, freedom from state control over ownership of property and business enterprises including all other areas of social life becomes the only objective of capitalism.
2. Capitalist mode of production has evolved through three stages:
 - a) Simple cooperatives of small number of workers who labour together to produce complete items from start to finish;
 - b) Production done on the basis of division of labor and specialization of skill;
 - c) Modern industrial system in which production is done with powerful machines.In capitalist mode of production survives by means of transformation of money into means of production and labor power-> labor power turns the means of production into products -> marketing of these production turns them into money again. Some of the money thus earned are saved to accumulate movable and immovable capital for future investment.
3. Being market-driven, capitalism is also known as market-economy. Before the emergence of capitalistic mode of production, craftsmen and artisans used to produce their items primarily to satisfy the needs of the local people; the producers were not familiar with the demands of the larger market. Moreover, business used to depend on a system of exchange of goods, but under the capitalist system money became the common medium of all kinds of business transactions because it is more versatile, easier to carry and easier to reinvestment. With increase in

business, standardization of pricing of goods became comparatively easy. Marx explains that 'money serves a universal measure of value'.

4. Capitalism opened up newer horizons in business and production with its market-driven system in the production of commodities that often used to surpass the actual need of the customers. Capitalists develop a well-knit and well-organised distribution system under their own guidance and control; it does not opt for state control over their enterprises except during any crisis. But any intervention from the state should be of a limited nature only. Supporters of capitalism argue that the decisions of the consumers should be final in determining the quality, quantity and type items to be produced; yet in various ways capitalists impose their decisions on the consumers.
5. In capitalist mode of production there is always tough competition among the capitalists for accumulation of capital. They compete with each other as manufacturers of the same items; competition continues for capturing the market, for increasing own market share and for getting loans from banks and other agencies to expand the business. All capitalist industrial organizations try to reduce the cost of production by depriving the workers of their just wages or by increasing their working hours. It also compels capitalists to invest in research and development; this in turn enables science and technology to advance in capitalist countries. In the process, the large number of relatively small capitalists is replaced by a small number of big capitalists.
6. In the opinion of Lenin, fierce competition pushes capitalism to a new height of the stage of imperialism in which capitalism becomes monopoly capitalism with centralization of capital and production, emergence of finance capital, export of capital, creation of international syndicates or cartels of big capitalists and division of the world among themselves for monopoly business.
7. Profit making and profit motives are two other important features of capitalism. To make profit capitalists clandestinely create a sense of want among the consumers, it acts as the greatest impetus of expansion. This is in contrary to the values of the middle ages when both profit and interests were highly condemned; therefore, during that period industry could not flourish at all. The emergence of the proletariat from a class –in –itself to a class-for –itself empowers it enough to confront the capitalist-owners with demands for their rightful claims and soon a class –struggle between the two ensues. Though the bourgeois theoreticians cannot deny the existence of class-struggle, they favor class-collaboration more.

8. Capitalists are extremely fond of democracy and they are proud of the fact that capitalism creates an environment for the success of democracy. This may be true from a theoretical perspective, but in reality democracy has lost much of its glory in capitalist states because it faces many contradictions within the exploitative situation. Real democracy can survive only where there is neither any gross economic inequality nor it is ruled by a particular class.
9. Capitalist class uses the state machinery for its own purpose fulfilment, such as continuation of exploitation, suppression of mass protest or agitation of the working class. Thus under the capitalist system state becomes an instrument of oppression, a puppet in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Engels wrote in his *Anti Daring* - "The state is the representative of the bourgeoisie".
10. Another fundamental feature of capitalist mode of production is the unlimited control enjoyed by the capitalists and their managerial agents over the means of production; they control everything related to production of commodities, starting from the quantity and quality of what type of technology to be used in production, the standard of workplace environment, marketing strategy for the produced goods, decisions regarding the wages or cost of labor-power, policies to supplement the deficits in labor-power, determining the work-hour for the labour –force, policies regarding the process of generation of surplus value – everything is decided by the capitalists themselves or by their paid agents. This help them to maintain full control over each and every aspect of industrial production.
11. Alienation of workers, according to Marx, is a serious issue in the capitalist mode of production. In his multivolume book *Capital* he raises the issue repeatedly. His observation is that capitalism separates the product of labour from labour itself. Within the increasingly complex system of capitalism an 'industrial reserve army' of jobless workers, in the interests of the capitalists, have to stay as the reservoir of labour ; at the same time, the labourers who work for the capitalists become alienated from their labour itself. Marx writes, "The labourers... Constantly produces material, objective wealth, but in the form of capital of an alien power that dominates and exploits him." (*Capital*. Chap. XXIII. p. 535). In his opinion, capitalism alienates workers from the things they create, from their own human self and from other workers as well. Division of labour produces alienation by dividing men and by destroying their human qualities.

12.6 Historical Role of Capitalism

In Marx's words, capitalism has a 'wolfish hungering after surplus value', so it always aims at 'restless, never ending process of profit making' by forcing the development of the productive powers by creating the material conditions suitable for a higher form of society to ensure full and free development of all individuals

Marx and Engels recognized the historical role of capitalism - the role that has marked it as something special - in their 'Communist Manifesto'. Now, let's look at this role of capitalism:

- Capitalists appeared within the feudalistic social system as a rising class that ventured into the society to develop the forces of production and in doing this they had to face many challenges from the feudal authority of the 18th century state in particular and the social-cultural value system in general. Capitalism was able to unite all the anti-feudal forces and to severely affect the prevailing social-political- economic structure of the society. Admitting the bold role capitalism Marx and Engels commented in Communist Manifesto that “”The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.”
- The capitalist mode of production introduced revolutionary changes in the forces of production; it has been noticed that within about one hundred years of their existence, the bourgeoisie was able to bring in changes in production forces that were more even more than the sum total of production-forces of all the ages of the past. The feudal relations of property was no longer compatible with the productive forces of the new age; the fetters of the old order had been burst asunder by the newly emerged capitalist system out of necessity.
- The role played by the bourgeoisie was both historical and revolutionary; it brought feudal socio-political system to an end; as each new stage of socio-economic development is a stage of social revolution the bourgeois leadership that championed the changes occupied historical and revolutionary position.
- Marx and Engels observe in their Communist Manifesto that the bourgeoisie has simplify the class antagonism by splitting the society as a whole into two great classes facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.
- Compared to its preceding societies the capitalist mode of production and its accompanying socio- economic system are far more advanced and progressive in cultural, technological, social- political, religious and all other related aspects.

However, it has removed all kinds of traditional humane ties only to tighten the ties of profit and money; the exploitation that was previously veiled by religious and political illusions, has been substituted by naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation only.

- Capitalism has brought the status of 'noble' professions of doctors, lawyers, priests, scientists and poets down to the level of wage- labourers.
- Everything, even family relations are now judged in financial terms.
- The age of capitalism has witnessed tremendous enterprise of men, the scientific and technological achievements of mankind surpassed the success of all other ages because the bourgeoisie cannot survive without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. All old but stable relationships and traditional value-based opinions are replaced in the capitalist period.
- The bourgeoisie, in its urge to exploit the world market, has given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. With time, old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, as Marx and Engels observe, give way to universal and interdependence of nations. It proves that bourgeoisie revolutionizes the whole world.
- Fast machine production and improved system of communication have civilized all the communities including the most primitive and barbaric ones. Both Marx and Engels observe that the bourgeoisie creates 'a world after its own image'.
- Converting the rural society into an urban one, they build big cities whose population outnumber the population of any village area; it makes the country dependent on the towns, barbarian and semi-barbarian countries on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, and the countries of the East on the West.
- Under the capitalist system, centralization of resources happen and only a few enjoy the pleasure of property while the rest remain in poverty.
- A very important role of capitalism is that it has conquered Nature and subjected it to the control of man; started application of chemicals and machines in agricultural and industrial production, adopted steamship navigation and established railways, electric telegraph system for faster communication and transportation of products, huge continents were cleared for organized agricultural activities, canals were cut in Suez and Panama to ease sea voyages. Huge increase in population is another contribution of capitalism

- Last but not the least, capitalist mode of production has created, as Marxists believe, a revolutionary class of proletariats- the class that will one day rise to cause the down fall of the all -powerful bourgeoisie.

12.7 Contradiction and Crisis of Capitalism

A. Contradictions

Marx observed that contradictions were inherent in every capitalist society, so much so that there was no means to get rid of it. These contradictions are not parts of any outside source or influence but are born out of the capitalist system itself. The nature and speed of growth in the fields of science and technology, transport and communication, production and marketing of products, the production system and the related production relations - all these have been generated by capitalism . Compared to all other preceding stages of society's development, such as primitive communism, slave society and feudal social system, the growth of capitalism is truly miraculous; but this also contains all the seeds of contradictions and crises it faces. For example, one of the most significant features of capitalism is over production as production is made for making profit, which should be huge, but the society is not always ready for consumption of that level.

- a) **Class Contradiction:** In capitalism, contradiction means contradiction of classes. The capitalist mode of production divides the society into two broad classes- the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; the former is the owner and the latter is the wage-workers. They exist side by side and each is indispensable to the other. Capitalist-owners exploit workers in its own interests and the workers, though ruthlessly exploited by the former, are compelled to work under excruciating conditions for survival. They have to sell their hard labour at a cost much lower than their expectation and requirement.
- b) A second contradiction that arises from within capitalism is that, industrialization requires variation of work and consequent fitness of workers both for varied work and hard labour. But technological modernization and specialization of skill lead to division of labour which ruthlessly fetters the wage workers to the prevailing system of production and robs them of any opportunity to either develop their aptitude or acquire any new skill.
- c) In Volume III of Capital (pp.242-259) Marx exposes the contradiction between social production and private ownership. By social production he means, in the

process of its continuous growth capitalism is aided by various agents who become integrally connected to it, then his production becomes a social production and it assumes a social character though the ownership remains in the hand of the capitalist/s. In this way, the production becomes more and more social in character but ownership of the forces of production remain in the hand of the individual owner/s. As production continues to become more social in character, capital becomes more powerful in its presence, appropriation of profit by capitalists becomes more anachronistic in nature. At this juncture, the contradiction between the general social power that nurtures capital and the private power of individual capitalists over these social conditions of production, as Marx sees it, “becomes even more irreconcilable”. Though the capitalists continue to control both the social production of capital and the whole economic system, it remains beyond their means either to resolve the contradiction or to come out of it.

- d) Contradictions within capitalism continue to grow, develop and gradually become mature, then crises in capitalism start to appear. Capitalism thrives with continuous development of mode of production, intensification of domination and exploitation of workers; when all these reach the apex stage, contradictions within capitalism mature and become irreconcilable. The capitalist means of production dehumanizes workers by degrading them to the level of an appendage of a machine and their lot continues to grow worse. New social forces emerge from within the society, but the old social organization fetters them down and the contradiction between the old and the new then comes out in the open. With extreme maturity of contradiction, the old society becomes decadent, the workers turn into a 'class for itself', contradictions reach the point of explosion for hastening the dissolution of capitalism. The proletariats cannot create contradictions, nor can they impose them upon the capitalist mode production or social system, they can only organize themselves into a formidable force to fight against the oppressive forces of capitalism.

B. Crises of Capitalism

When contradiction within the capitalist system becomes unmanageable, crises occur. The capitalist mode of production produces a sense of alienation among the workers as they become estranged from their own labour, the product of their own labour and a share in the values they create. As capitalist production continues to grow such estrangement grows simultaneously for some time for sure; but then there arises a

condition of diminishing return of profit forcing capitalists towards curtailment of investment and retrenchment of workers. This one crisis leads to another when capitalists adopt various measures to save capitalism from recession by over-pushing capital into industrial market; in the process an excess of workers takes place. Marx and Engels have clearly stated in their Communist Manifesto that the crises of capitalism that have overshadowed the crises of all other epochs are born out of the epidemic of overproduction; they call it “monetary barbarism”.

The appearance of capitalist mode of production with the bourgeoisie in a leading position signified the dawning of a new civilization that could easily outshine the achievements of all other past civilisations. It continues to create enormous wealth that is too much to contain for the bourgeois society. Naturally contradiction and crises crop up and the bourgeoisie try to conquer challenges with measures like enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces, by controlling new markets and by using the tools of oppression and exploitation of an unforeseen scale.

Kolakowski adds that the economic crises involving plundering the community’s wealth on a vast scale is a proof that capitalism fails to cope up with its own contradictions. The situation reveals the conflict between the level of technological advancement and the social conditions associated with it and also between the forces of production and the system in which they operate.

Many, however, argue that if the system becomes empathetic to the working class, raises their wages, absorbs the excess products and if the capitalists stop plundering the resources away then the crises can be avoided. But Marx believes that contradictions and crises of capitalism are integral parts of capitalism (*Capital*, Vol.II) and often occur after a period of prosperity. Taking cue from Marx, Kolakowski explains that it is not possible for the market to absorb all or even the bulk of the items produced. In the opinion of Lenin, capitalist production can grow only in fits and starts like two steps forward, and one step back.

The core feature of capitalism is Unequal development in society and this is true for all the capitalist countries. The owners of finance-capital of different countries take initiative to expand their monopoly control over the world-wide market by creating colonies for exploitation of natural and human resources and also for creating aggressive markets in their soil. In this way, the capitalist countries transform themselves as imperialistic powers as well. At this juncture, two things happen: firstly, the colonies under capitalistic- imperialist rule start various movements to free themselves from the oppressive clutches of the foreign powers; secondly, for the purpose of increasing

their profit and also expanding business in new territories the capitalist – imperialist states get involved in fierce competitions with each other. These two situations are known as ‘external crises’ of capitalism.

Another attack on capitalism comes from the communist ideology of the proletariat; this becomes a powerful tool against the oppressive monopoly of the capitalists. The socialist ideology becomes so powerful a tool of opposition that capitalism cannot survive for long. Though the capitalist state uses all kinds of violent, oppressive machineries of power under the guise of liberal democratic principles, moribund capitalism has to face its downfall.

12.8 Collapse of Capitalism

Marx and Engels, the two protagonists of the unique interpretation of society, believe that the capitalist mode of production and the total capitalist system unknowingly nurtures the seeds of its own destruction within the system itself. So the weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism later get turned against the bourgeoisie itself. The bourgeoisie emerged as a formidable force to unseat feudal lords from power by popularizing a new mode of production in which the capitalists were at the helm of affairs. Once the capitalist mode of production reaches its zenith, Marx and Engels believe, that cracks in the system start to appear; at this juncture the proletariat come forward as a ‘class for itself’ to overthrow capitalism. This will bring in revolutionary changes in the social-political-economic structure of the society. Marx views the collapse of capitalism as inevitable. The economic oppression and exploitation of the proletariat in the hands of the bourgeoisie will cause the class struggle to escalate and finally it will erupt into a revolution; mere increase in the wages of the workers cannot stop the possibilities of a revolution. It is true that the bourgeoisie try their best to alleviate the possibilities of contradictions and crises, but their efforts have only limited effects.

The contradictions or the inconsistencies that destroy capitalism from within are of many types; getting rid of these is not possible as there are very limited means to remove them. Lenin has explained the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism from a political angle. According to him, the inadequacy of the internal market for the huge amount of goods they produce compels the capitalist countries to look for profitable markets beyond their borders by colonizing distant lands. This is known as imperialist tendency and Lenin calls this stage as Imperialist. The unhealthy competition between industrialized, super powerful states for a share of market in the less developed

countries created instability and possibilities of war. Lenin has commented that the First World War is a war among capitalist countries. Taking the opportunity of this volatile situation the Third World countries strengthen their national liberation movement to emerge as sovereign, independent states with the help of so called bourgeois values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Now the capitalist forces have to face the double faced challenge of self-destructive war and the mounting pressure of national liberation movements in colonies across the world. The capitalist imperialist countries now, reaching the highest stage of capitalism, have little power left to resist the challenges that plague them. Therefore, the moribund capitalism fails to stand the blows of proletarian revolution, world war and liberation movements in colonies and it collapses signifying the end of an era. With it comes the era of socialism first and then it will gradually develop itself to a communist order to create a fully egalitarian, property-less, class-less, state-less society. At this stage, both Marx and Engels believe, the state will wither away.

12.9 Critical Appraisal of Marxist Theory of Capitalism

To conclude our discussion on capitalism it can be said that Marx has completely altered the definitions of both capital and capitalism. Moreover, he has revealed that capitalism arose out of the desire to extract surplus value, traditional practice of saving and economic exploitation, from within the transformed nature of mode of production and of the wage workers. We cannot also ignore the role played by industrial revolution behind the emergence of capitalism. He has also specified that though these crises are serious in nature, these alone cannot push capitalism towards its end; for that class-struggle is essential. Theoretically his observations are true, but in reality everything did not act accordingly.

Communist Manifesto was published in 1848; since then the world has witnessed so many changes that all the conclusions drawn by Marx and Engels do not seem to be true in the post-war society. To this date, neither the world has witnessed proletarian revolution in capitalist countries, nor has capitalism experienced any disintegration; it is yet to reach the moribund stage. One probable reason behind this is the presence of a self-regulatory mechanism built within itself that saves it from the blows it receives from many quarters, especially during trying times. So it can be assumed that despite apprehensions expressed by Marx, Engels and other Marxist thinkers about the future of capitalism, its in-built safety mechanism not only protects it from collapse but makes it stronger and long-lasting.

Lenin is correct to mention that the imperialist powers are involved in armed conflicts among themselves over control of business or resources, but contrary to his conviction, it has not weakened capitalism today. The powerful presence of MNCs, the global business operates today shows that capitalism has changed its strategies to flourish. The workers today, too, have shifted their goals – they want to change their economic lot not by resorting to class struggle and thus removing the capitalists from power, but by parliamentary tactics; they have been able to achieve a number of concessions through collective bargaining. Capitalists have also a change of attitude towards the workers and their claims and rights; national governments either on their own or by following international guidelines make more humane laws and policies.

Evan Luard, in his book, *Socialism without State* (Macmillan, 1991) has identified several flaws in Marx's arguments regarding the fall of capitalism. He points out that Marx's prediction about proletarian revolution, collapse of capitalism and establishment of stateless, classless society has proved wrong. Rather, the antagonism of classes in the erstwhile Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries has caused the downfall of socialism itself. He further observes that capitalism has not destroyed itself with over production and declining profit, instead, the governments of all capitalist countries have come together to prevent its fall. Though large scale exploitation exists, the big corporations also exist by giving more and more concessions to the workers, the level of wage has been raised too. The capitalists of the modern world have softened their attitudes towards the workers and do not always resort to coercive measures against them. Various welfare projects have been implemented to improve their material conditions, labour laws in many countries are so rigid that dismissal of employees is not easy as before in many European capitalist countries and in case of unemployment there are various social support schemes for citizens.

In conclusion we can, therefore, say that though Marx and Engels have rightly decoded the core issues of capitalism, all their predictions regarding its future possibilities did not prove to be correct.

12.10 Conclusion

As a believer in uninterrupted progress of human civilization and of industrial society he recognized limitless growth aided by science, technology and rational thinking of man. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, doubts regarding the downfall of capitalism started to appear; in 1895 Engels questioned the efficacy of proletarian revolution to change the world because the world order did not change according

to their perceptions. It was Marx's failure that he did not take into account the resilience of the capitalist system to stabilize itself and to emerge as more powerful. Moreover, hatred of capitalism does not necessarily lead to socialism. In the 1890s Edward Bernstein could sense that many of Marx's predictions became obsolete. Neither did peasantry and middle class disappear nor did the small business organizations get eliminated; wage workers, also, did not become the overwhelming majority of the population and the middle class emerged as a potential power. Critics like Bernstein questioned the working class's capability of controlling the means of production.

Even though we accept the drawbacks of his theory we must admit that he was a genius who looked at the world from a unique perspective so far unknown to anybody. Many of his analyses and arguments regarding the progress of human civilization make us understand the history of human society in a better way. But being a man of the nineteenth century he only witnessed nineteenth century capitalism and did not experience many of the later day developments like the rise of fascism, totalitarianism, and welfare state system. Therefore his analysis was applicable to capitalism of that period only. Karl Popper, a brilliant scholar of the twentieth century, tore Marx's predictions regarding capitalism's inevitable end, rather like many of the past scholars Marx was seen as an enemy of the open society. His historicism, holism and utopian social engineering –all have been rejected by Popper, who prefers gradual piecemeal and modest process of social evolution with room for rectification of errors.

Today, many critics think that Marx would be best remembered for his criticism of early nineteenth century capitalism and politics, or in the words of Koestler as “a God that failed”.

12.11 Summary

This unit has explored various aspects of Marx's concept of capitalism including its origin, development, characteristics and shortcomings. The concept, though, was once hailed as a scientific and very logical explanation of ups and downs in capitalism, it has lost much of its popularity with the submission of the world to its lustre. While socialist mode of production has faced massive downfall, capitalism has spread its powerful wings all over the world; so Marx's predictions regarding the future of capitalism appears to be false, but his analysis of the working of capitalism, of its oppressive way of operation and exploitation it imposes on unsuspecting individuals are all true.

12.12 Questions

Answer in brief : 5 marks

1. What is meant by capitalist mode of production?
2. What, according to Marx, was the reason behind the appearance of capitalism?
3. Mention any two important features of capitalism.
4. What is Marx's view about the collapse of capitalism?
5. Examine any two important contributions of capitalism?

Answer in detail : 5 marks

1. Write a note on the origin and development of capitalism.
2. Examine, in detail, the characteristics of capitalist mode of production.
3. Make a critical assessment of the historical role played by capitalism in society.
4. Discuss, in detail, the meaning and nature of capitalism from the Marxist perspective.
5. Critically examine the contradictions and crises that plague the capitalist system.

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Unit 13 □ Class and Class Struggle

Structure

- 13.1 Learning Objectives**
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13.1 Learning Objectives

The main thrust of this unit is:

- To understand the concept of class.
- To know about the characteristics of class.
- To learn about the class structure in various stages involved in the history of society.
- To know about significant classes under capitalism
- To understand the relationship between production and society in various stages of history.
- To understand the Marxian concept of class struggle.

13.2 Introduction

Karl Marx did not consider himself a sociologist. However, we can find sociological theory in Marx's work. Like Comte, Marx believed that individuals ought to endeavour to transform society. Exiled from Germany for advocating revolution, Marx arrived in England and asserted that class conflict drives human history. He stated that the bourgeoisie (the capitalists, those who possess the means of producing wealth—capital, land, factories, and machinery) are in perpetual conflict with the proletariat (the exploited workers, who lack ownership of the means of production). This conflict can conclude solely when the working class unites in revolution and liberates itself from its shackles. The outcome will be a classless society without exploitation, where individuals will contribute based on their capabilities and receive goods and services according to their needs. While Marx advocated for revolution as the sole means for workers to seize social control, he did not formulate the political system known as communism. This represents a subsequent application of his concepts. Marx himself experienced revulsion upon hearing discussions regarding his perspectives on social life. In contrast to Comte and Spencer, Marx did not perceive himself as a sociologist. He dedicated years to research in the British Museum library in London, where he extensively produced works on history, philosophy, economics, and political science. Due to his insights into the dynamics of social classes, particularly the conflict between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” many sociologists regard Marx as a pivotal classical sociologist.

13.3 Biographical Sketch

Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818, in Trier, a small town located in the southern German Rhineland. He was raised in a middle-class Jewish family that had converted to Protestantism to evade the social challenges faced by Jews in German culture. Marx's father, a legal practitioner, significantly influenced his life, serving as both advisor and friend, and Marx maintained regular correspondence with him until his demise. In contrast to his father, little information is available about Marx's mother and her influence on his life. In 1835, at the age of 17, Marx commenced his studies in law at the University of Bonn but soon migrated to the University of Berlin.

In April 1841, Marx obtained his doctorate and returned to Bonn to look for work at the university. Unable to secure academic employment, he tried to sustain himself

as a journalist. During that period, he visited Arnold Ruge, the editor of a prestigious periodical known as the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*. Ruge urged Marx to contribute, and in 1842, Marx published his first piece in the *Jahrbücher*. Subsequently, Ruge assisted Marx in publishing a series of critical pieces and ultimately helped him obtain the editorship of the *Jahrbücher*. In 1843, Marx relocated to Cologne, where he examined the works of Ludwig Feuerbach. His critique of Hegel and his prominence in German philosophy influenced his writings during this time. In that year, Marx authored two significant works critiquing Hegel's notion of the state, entitled *A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On the Jewish Question* (Morrison, 2006).

In October 1843, Marx relocated to Paris to study political economy, where he examined the writings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. During his time in Paris, social and political issues intensified, prompting his involvement in the socialist movement. In May 1844, Marx composed notes on classical economics and alienated labour titled *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, which became one of his most renowned works. During the revolution in France and throughout Europe, Marx became more involved in economic questions and this began an open criticism of society and eventually a more intense focus on economic problems. During his examination of these enquiries, Marx studied Frederick Engels' 'The Conditions of the Working Class in 1845' to understand the problems of industrial workers.

Between early 1845 and early 1848, Marx lived in Brussels, the capital of a rapidly industrialising Belgium. In Brussels, Marx published *The Holy Family* (1845) with his new associate and partner Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Marx also collaborated with Engels on a collection of manuscripts commonly referred to as *The German Ideology* (1845–46). Marx authored and published *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847). Marx engaged in political activity throughout his adulthood. Two significant publications are *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), written by Marx and Engels before the February Revolution, and *The Class Struggles in France* (1850), authored by Marx after relocating to London, in which he analysed the ultimate failure of the 1848 revolution in France. From 1852 to 1862, Marx authored more than three hundred articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*. Following the upheavals of 1848, Marx participated in the International Working Men's Association from 1864 until 1874. Over the next ten years, Marx devoted himself to writing and preparing his most famous work, entitled *Capital*, which was published in 1867. In the following years, Marx wrote two more volumes of *Capital* and, eighteen years later, he died in London at the age of 65 in 1883 (Ritzer, 2012).

13.4 Intellectual Roots

Marx was equally influenced by and critical of both Hegel and Feuerbach. Marx, influenced by Feuerbach, criticised Hegel's dedication to idealist philosophy. Marx took this position due to his materialist perspective and his interest in action in reality. Hegel conceptualises social facts, such as wealth and the state, as ideas rather than real, material entities. Hegel focused entirely on abstract mental work. This differs significantly from Marx's focus on the work of real, conscious individuals. Consequently, Hegel addressed irrelevant subjects as Marx was concerned. Moreover, Marx believed that Hegel's idealism developed from a conservative political viewpoint. According to Hegel, the process of evolution occurred regardless of human control and actions. In any case, people seemed to be moving toward a greater consciousness of the world as it could be, suggesting that there was no need for revolutionary change; the process was already moving in the "desired" direction. Marx commended Feuerbach's critique of Hegel on several grounds, however, he remained mostly dissatisfied with Feuerbach's viewpoint (Morrison, 2006). Feuerbach concentrated on the realm of religion, while Marx argued that the entire social world, especially the economy, also required examination. Marx acknowledged Feuerbach's materialism but believed that Feuerbach excessively concentrated, in a one-dimensional and non-dialectical manner, on the material world. Feuerbach failed to include the most important of Hegel's contributions, the dialectic, in his materialist orientation (Coser, 2006). Marx synthesised what he considered the two most significant components of these philosophers—Hegel's dialecticism and Feuerbach's materialism—into his theoretical framework, dialectical materialism, which emphasises dialectical relations within the material world (Abraham and Morgan, 1989).

13.5 Concept of Class

Marx frequently employed the term 'class' in his writings, but he never systematically defined its meaning. He has taken the concept as referring to a group of people who share similar circumstances regarding their control over the means of production. This, however, does not constitute a comprehensive account of Marx's use of the term. For Marx, class was consistently defined by its capacity for conflict. Individuals constitute a class to the extent that they share a common conflict with others over surplus value. Capitalism inherently creates a conflict of interest between employers

and wage labourers, who generate surplus value. This intrinsic conflict generates classes. Class is a concept that is theoretically and historically variable, defined by its potential for conflict. A theory explaining the origins of potential conflict within a society is necessary before class identification. According to Marx, a class genuinely exists only when individuals recognise their antagonistic relationships with other classes. Without this awareness, they merely represent what Marx termed a ‘class in itself’. Upon identifying the conflict, they evolve into a distinct class—a class for itself (Morrison, 2006).

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels declared that the “history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. This perspective posits that since the beginning of human society from its primitive and relatively homogeneous condition, it has consistently been stratified into classes that conflict in the pursuit of their respective interests. Within capitalism, the factory serves as the focal point of conflict between classes—between exploiters and the exploited, and between buyers and sellers—rather than a place for functional collaboration. According to Marx, class interests and power confrontations are the primary determinants of social and historical processes (Adams and Sydie, 2001).

Marx’s analysis consistently focuses on how individuals’ positions concerning the means of production, specifically their unequal access to limited resources and power, influence interpersonal relationships. He observes that unequal access does not necessarily result in active class struggle in all circumstances. He regarded it as self-evident that the potential for class conflict is intrinsic to every stratified society, as such societies systematically produce conflicts of interest among individuals and groups situated differently within the social hierarchy, particularly concerning the means of production. Marx examined how particular positions within the social structure influenced the experiences of individuals and predisposed them to engage in actions aimed at enhancing their collective circumstances (Ritzer, 2012).

13.6 Characteristics of Class

In his analysis of class, Marx articulated several fundamental characteristics. Primarily, he observed the historical propensity of societies to divide into two disparate social classes: patricians and slaves, lords and serfs, or capitalists and wage labourers. Second, he posited that classes are invariably structured according to what he termed ‘manifold and subordinate gradations of social rank,’ which indicated that classes are hierarchically organised and that these gradations of rank consistently form in relation

to social and economic privileges that tend to concentrate at the apex of the class hierarchy, with minimal or no privileges or power at the base. Third, according to Marx, classes are perpetually engaged in what he designates a ‘historical struggle’ which is conducted as an ‘uninterrupted fight between the contending classes which often ends in the ruins of these classes.’ Fourth, he proposed that in each economic era, a given population is transformed into a class when the prevailing economic conditions of existence act to transform this group into a relatively homogeneous population. Fifth, Marx postulated that the transformation of a ‘mass of people’ into a class engendered what he termed a common set of interests that define a class situation and that, over time, this class becomes a mass mobilised in a struggle or a conflict which opposes itself to the interests of the dominant classes in a political struggle (Callinicos, 2003).

13.7 Class Structure in Different Societies

Marx viewed world history through the lens of various ownership structures concerning the means of production, positing that there are fundamentally four distinct economic stages in which this ownership manifests. Marx refers to the initial form of ownership as primitive. This describes a society with a primitive economy where individuals primarily engage in hunting and gathering for sustenance. The division of labour is basic, private property is undeveloped, and the social structure is rooted in familial and kinship systems. Due to communal property, a developed system of class relations is absent, although some nascent exploitation exists within the familial structure. A productive system primarily based on kinship and a collective, cooperative approach to production gave rise to the tribal association. This resulted in a society devoid of class divisions and a production system characterised by enhanced social equality and collaboration in fulfilling material and economic requirements. Consequently, no predominant class possessed or monopolised the means of production, as these were generally communally shared, resulting in minimal or no exploitation among groups. Ancient societies exhibit the second type of ownership Marx examined. This represents a type of social organisation that emerged from a coalition of tribes, resulting in the formation of city-states and the establishment of a political and civil structure (Callinicos, 2003). Ancient civilisations primarily existed in urban centres, supported by a predominantly agricultural rural economy that was characterised by basic industry and a system of trade and commerce. Such societies existed in classical antiquity in Greece and Rome, where a patrician class monopolised the means of production,

resulting in rigid class relations between the dominant patricians and the subordinate slaves. Unlike primitive societies, private property and a system of class relations emerged from property ownership. The relationship between property owners and labour producers evolved into a class system for citizens and slaves. In contrast to primitive societies, class divisions had solidified, and the predominant mode of labour was slavery. Such societies encompassed extensive territories, and their productive systems featured a comprehensive division of labour. Furthermore, civil, political, and military authority emerged as supplementary elements to the productive system. In this scenario, a patrician class, consisting of a military elite, monopolises the ownership of the means of production. This class sustains itself by conquest, appropriating lands and subjugating populations as slaves. The patrician class sustains its economic viability by seeking increasingly expansive means of production, leading to a political structure that amalgamates conquered territories to establish new political entities.

The stratification of society into patricians and slaves directly stemmed from the economic structure and the social relations of production. Newly acquired slaves from other regions supplanted the declining slave population. The dominant production relations exist between patrician and enslaved labourers, with the patrician class deriving its wealth from the enslaved individuals who serve as direct producers. Marx identifies feudal society as a third form of ownership. In this social structure, agriculture serves as the primary economic production source, with ownership of the means of production centralised among a land-owning class comprised of the nobility. The economy's focal point was the countryside, characterised by widespread agriculture, minimal industry, and underdeveloped urban life. Unlike primitive or ancient societies, landholders were the exclusive proprietors of land, the primary means of economic production, and centralising ownership.

The primary form of property was land, leading to the emergence of a stratified class system consisting of a peasant class engaged in essential physical labour and a class of landholders possessing social and political privileges, which granted them authority over both the labour of the serfs and their economic output. Feudal societies predominantly thrived in Europe and England from the ninth to the seventeenth centuries, although they also appeared in the East, notably in India and China. Legal and political institutions supported the social and political authority of the landholders by granting them coercive power over the serf class. The fourth stage of ownership of the means of production emerges in industrial capitalism. Marx asserted that the emergence of industrial society led to the dismantling the feudal mode of production and a shift from a rural economy to an urban economy. During the decline of feudal

society, the forcible separation of peasant serfs from their land resulted in their transformation into wage labourers, compelled to sell their labour to meet their economic needs (Morrison, 2006).

13.8 Society, Production and Exploitation

Karl Marx saw human beings as producers. This is fundamental to his critique of political economy and his understanding of the structures of society. In his early work, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx delineates a dual aspect of production: the material and the social. The material part involves the physical transformation of nature to satisfy human needs, necessitating a systematic approach to production. The social dimension highlights the cooperative nature of production, wherein individuals participate in collective efforts to create products and services, which establish social relationships that regulate the production process.

Marx classifies these elements into two primary categories: the forces of production and the relations of production. The forces of production include the labour process. Human labour power and the means of production are the major elements of the labour process. We further categorise the means of production into two elements: the 'object of labour' and the 'instruments of labour.' The 'object of labour' includes land and raw materials, and the 'instrument of labour' indicates the tools employed in the manufacturing process. Marx asserts that tools are a crucial component of the labour process, and the evolution of productive forces is important for enhancing human living conditions. He contends that, even in a future communist society, the labour process will continue to be an essential element of human existence (Callinicos, 2003).

The relations of production are crucial to identifying the social dimensions of production. Work is inherently social because it relies on the collaboration of individuals to achieve shared objectives. The organisation of labour includes the material conditions of production and the skills of the workers involved. Marx emphasised the control of the means of production. He argues that to understand production, we need to identify who governs these means in society. This control is important for two reasons: firstly, no labour process is possible without access to means of production, and secondly, the allocation of these means has significance to the class system of society. In a class society, relations of production are characterised not as relations between individuals but as relationships between worker and capitalist, farmer and landlord, and so on. According to Marx, class relations rooted in exploitation are essential for understanding society. Marx called 'relations of production, which correspond to a definite stage of development of the productive

forces' a mode of production. The nature of exploitation depends on the allocation of the means of production. In slavery, the labourer serves as a means of production, the property of the master in the same way as the land on which the slave works, and the tools he or she uses. It appears that all the slaves are surplus labour since the slave is entitled to none of its product; it entirely goes to the master. In the case of feudalism, the peasant may possess some means of production but does not own the land upon which he works. In both these modes of production, exploitation is quite visible and depends on the physical power of the property owner over the direct producers. Under capitalism, however, the worker is legally free. He or she is not tied to the capitalist in the way the slave is to the master or the serf to the lord. Exploitation depends not on the physical subjection of the producer to the property owner, but on economic pressures, and above all the fact that the worker does not own the means of production. The capitalist uses his control of the means of production to force people to work for him, and, once he has employed them, to work longer than is necessary to replace their wages, thus creating surplus labour (Coser, 2006).

13.9 Significant Classes and Class Relations in Capitalist Society

Marx classifies the capitalist mode of production into two primary classes: the bourgeoisie (capitalist), who own the means of production, and the proletariat (worker), who lack these means and must sell their labour force. This represents the fundamental economic structure of employment and ownership—a condition of inequality that cultural ideology normalises and perpetuates. Marx posited that proletarians would eventually lose their skills as they increasingly serviced machines that had their skills incorporated into them. As members of the proletariat produce solely for exchange, they are also consumers. They must use their wages to purchase necessities because they lack the means to produce for their own needs. Consequently, proletarians are entirely dependent on their wages for subsistence. This renders the proletariat dependent on those who provide the wages. Capitalists are individuals who own the means of production. Understanding capital itself is necessary before gaining a comprehensive understanding of capitalism. Instead of satisfying human needs or desires, capital generates more money and invests it. Money becomes capital only because of a social relationship between, on the one hand, the proletariat, which performs the work and must purchase the product, and, on the other, those who have invested the money. Marx asserts that the ability of capital to generate profit is not innate but rather a

power relation. Capital cannot increase except by exploiting those who perform the work. The capitalist system is the social structure that emerges from that exploitative relationship. Capitalists are those who subsist on the profit of capital. They are the beneficiaries of the proletariat's exploitation. The concept of capital encompasses a social relationship between the owners of the means of production and those who exploit their wage labour. For Marx, class is defined as a social relation rather than a rank in society. In Marx's analysis, the capitalist class is closely linked to the existence of the proletariat, and vice versa. No one can exist without each other. The relationship between classes is characterised by contradiction and antagonism, marked by struggle, conflict, and opposing interests. The structure and base of a social class may be defined in objective terms, as groups with a shared status with respect to property or the means of production (Ritzer, 2012).

Marx interprets the history of "civilised" societies as a class struggle between the producers and the controllers of production. According to Marx, a conflict exists between capitalists (bourgeoisie) and wage labourers (proletariat). For Marx, class antagonism originates from the fact that dominion over social production inherently involves dominion over the class that generates good. In capitalism, this manifests as the exploitation of labourers by the bourgeoisie. Until the change takes place the contradiction between capitalists and proletariats will become worse. The two major opposing classes will become more and more evident in society. Competition from megastores and franchise chains will lead to the shutdown of many small, independent enterprises; mechanisation will replace artisans; and some capitalists will be ousted through efforts to establish monopolies. All these displaced people will be forced to enter into the lower ranks of the proletariat. Marx referred to this inevitable increase of the proletariat as 'Proletarianisation' (Morrison, 2006).

13.10 Class Struggle

The concept of class struggle, although not originally proposed by Karl Marx, remains one of his significant contributions to sociology. Raymond Aron posits that classes are the primary actors in the historical account of capitalism. The class struggle in society arises from the divergent interests of different groups of people. Marxism posits the existence of two classes: the bourgeoisie, who control capital and the means of production, and the proletariat, who supply labour. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels assert that a conflict exists between the two classes. This conflict is referred to as the class struggle (Aron, 2017).

Marx made a distinction between objective groups within societies, like those seen in Europe in 1850, a binary class system that led to revolution. He classified the feudal aristocracy and landlords, the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry, agricultural workers, industrial workers or the proletariat, and the sub-proletariat as objective and transitory classes in Germany. As a philosopher of history, he perceived only two opposing classes in the long term. The feudal aristocracy and the petty bourgeoisie exemplify the ephemeral nature of these objective classes. The nobles represent the vestiges of a prior economic phase, now supplanted by bourgeois capitalists, who dominate industrial output. The petit bourgeoisie comprises small proprietors who actively engage in the operation of their means of production, also referred to as owner-workers. Marx posits that the petit bourgeoisie cannot compete with large enterprises, ultimately leading to their displacement into the proletariat or working class. Consequently, current social classes will ultimately transform into two opposing classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Among all the classes confronting capitalism today, the proletariat is the only genuinely revolutionary class. Other classes deteriorate and ultimately disappear in the presence of modern industry; the proletariat is its unique and fundamental outcome (Adams and Sydie, 2001).

Marx and Engels delineate a four-stage process of polarisation: common conditions, consciousness, organisation, and revolution. An analysis of each of these phases is warranted. Since the inception of their dominance, members of the ruling class—capitalists in contemporary industrial society—have recognised the necessity of collaboration and mutual effort. They constitute a distinct class, signifying their awareness of shared interests. The workers constitute a distinct class; despite sharing similar conditions, they fail to acknowledge their collective interests. The proletariat enters the second stage of revolution when they achieve class consciousness, thereby transforming into a separate class. The emergence of such awareness or consciousness among workers is inevitable; however, it progresses gradually for two reasons. The workers compete with each other for material possessions. Secondly, benevolent actions by the bourgeoisie make the proletariat feel appreciated and make the bourgeoisie feel good so that neither class is motivated to change the status quo.

According to Marx and Engels, the emergence of class consciousness among the proletariat is inevitable. The proletariat will transform into a class unto itself for two primary reasons. First, by driving them together into factories, the bourgeoisie weld them together, as they discuss and recognise their common interests. Second, the proletariat will evolve into a ‘class for itself’ because certain bourgeois individuals, who understand history will break away and join the proletariat. The third stage is

organisation, followed by the fourth and ultimate stage, revolution. Despite intermittent power struggles among parties competing for dominance, the ultimate revolution will emerge when the proletariat insurgents against the capitalist bourgeoisie. This uprising will originate with workers opposing their national bourgeoisie, but it will ultimately have global implications. The result of the revolution will be a communist society (Abraham and Morgan, 1989).

Marx posits that a transitional phase known as the dictatorship of the proletariat will succeed in a revolution. All post-revolutionary societies will temporarily rely on this dictatorship as the rest of the world undergoes the revolution. Marx asserted that (1) certain points in the history of production are inextricably linked to the existence of classes, (2) the class struggle always ends in the dictatorship of the proletariat, and (3) this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and a classless society. Marx and Engels posited that since it has consistently served as a tool of class oppression for the ruling class, the state will ultimately diminish or cease to exist due to a lack of purpose. By eliminating the existing conditions of capitalist production, characterised by the dichotomy of owner and worker, oppressor and oppressed, the proletariat will eradicate the foundations of class antagonism (Morrison, 2006).

The class struggle takes place on three levels. These are the following:

(i) Economic Struggle:

The economic struggle is the conflict arising between opposing classes within the economic sphere. This conflict is characterised by the opposition that the exploited classes develop against the exploiting classes at this level. According to Lenin, class struggle is the collective struggle of workers against their employers to secure improved conditions in the sale of their labour power and to enhance their living and working conditions.

(ii) Ideological Struggle:

The class struggle manifests ideologically as a struggle between the beliefs of the exploited class and those of the exploiting class. In a capitalist society, this conflict represents a struggle between bourgeois ideology in its various manifestations and proletarian ideology grounded in Marxian theory.

(iii) Political Struggle:

The political struggle is the conflict arising between classes in their pursuit of political power—that is, in the effort to take over state power on their own. Lenin says that ‘every class struggle is a political struggle’.

13.11 Critical Appraisal

Despite its profound influence, the class struggle theory of Marx has been subject to criticism. Critics argue that Marx's focus on economic factors as the primary driver of social dynamics oversimplifies the complex nature of human societies. Additionally, they contend that Marx's prediction of an inevitable proletariat revolution has not been realised in most capitalist societies. Marx predicted many aspects of capitalistic society, including its relationship with the proletariat and the anticipated conflict between the proletariat and capitalists. Marx has overlooked social conditions. He has not differentiated between the social and economic classes (Aron, 2017). Some critics have asserted that the argument that all struggles are class struggles is fallacious. Furthermore, Critics argue that although Marx sees the proletariat as central to the social transformation towards communism, the proletariat has rarely occupied this prominent role and frequently constitutes one of the groups that are most resistant to communism. This problem is exacerbated by the reality that intellectuals have filled the gap left by the proletariat and replaced class conflict with discourse (Ritzer, 2012).

13.12 Conclusion

Marxian analysis of class and class struggle provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of capitalist society. With the development of large-scale industry, the proletariat constantly increases in size. Marx predicted that the number of proletariats would continually increase as elements of the lower-middle class were gradually absorbed into it. The modern industry thus sweeps aside all the skills of the past, creating but two great classes. Marx argued, that the revolutionary development of the proletariat would be aided by the fact that it was becoming increasingly urban, and hence its members were better able to communicate with one another. Furthermore, they were becoming better educated and politically sophisticated, partly because the bourgeoisie constantly pulled them into the political ground. However, the proletarians' efforts at organising against the bourgeoisie were often hindered. Marx believed they were destined to destroy capitalism because of the development of their class consciousness. Despite criticisms regarding the oversimplification of social dynamics and the failure of his predictions regarding the proletarian revolution, Marx's insights remain relevant in contemporary discussions of class and inequality.

13.15 Summary

In classical Marxian theory, the term class denotes the relationship between two opposing groups (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) determined by their ownership of the means of production. This unit has examined the concept of class and class struggle in the historical development of society as described by Karl Marx. He defined class based on individuals' relationship to the means of production and their class consciousness. According to Marxian theory, the historical account of society is fundamentally characterised by class conflict. Since the beginning of social inequality and exploitation in human history, society has been classified into antagonistic classes of haves and have-nots. The ongoing class struggle and change in the mode of production have resulted in social change from slavery to feudalism and from feudalism to capitalism. The ultimate social revolution would transform the capitalist society into socialism, eliminating the significance of classes, social inequality, and exploitation.

13.14 Questions

1. Define the Marxian concept of class. What are the major characteristics of class? (05)
2. Briefly discuss the various stages of society as given by Marx. (10)
3. Critically evaluate the theory of class struggle after Karl Marx. (10)
4. Analyse the class relations in capitalist society as given by Marx. (05)
5. Elucidate the relationship between bourgeoisie and proletariat in capitalist society (10)
6. What are the major forms of class struggle? (05)
7. Do you think 'class consciousness' is necessary for class struggle? Justify your answer. (05)

13.15 References

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Unit 14 □ Alienation

Structure

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14.1 Learning Objectives

The main thrust of this unit is:

- To understand the Hegel's concept of alienation.
- To learn about the religious alienation of Feuerbach.
- To know about Marx's idea of alienation.
- To understand the Marx's theory of human nature.
- To know about the different forms of alienation.

14.2 Introduction

Alienation emerged as an important and widely controversial subject of the twentieth century, and Karl Marx's theory significantly influenced the discourse. Critics of Marx and alienation tend to highlight two ideas about alienation that are present in Marx's writings. Some describe alienation as an individual's lack of fulfilment or self-realisation in a capitalist society. This concept of alienation entails the disconnection of individuals from their "species-being," a concept Marx borrowed from Feuerbach. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx understands species-being as comprising the features of human beings that distinguish them from other animals. People say that a capitalist society prevents the vast majority of people from exercising and achieving their uniquely human capacities. Alienation is a purely intellectual phenomenon for Hegel and Feuerbach. However, Karl Marx views it as a material and social process. Marx believed capitalism distorted the fundamental relationship between labour and human nature. He refers to this distorted relationship as alienation. The current discourse on Marx's notion of human nature and alienation originates primarily from earlier philosophical writings and continues to influence his later work. In his later writings on capitalist society, he avoided using the overly intellectual word alienation, though it remained a primary concern.

14.3 Hegel's Idea of Alienation

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the evolution of modern society led to the widespread use of the term "alienation". This term has been used to characterise a condition of disruption and change in the system of social relationships and human labour process. In the nineteenth century, Georg Hegel was the first to use it as an idea in philosophy. He used it to characterise the pursuit of self-realisation that occurred in a wider historical context. Marx and Ludwig Feuerbach were among the first after Hegel who systematically articulated the idea of alienation, and their writings serve as the foundation for a comprehensive theory of alienation (Morrison, 2006). In his book *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel coined the term "estrangement" to lay out an outline for a theory of human evolution. Hegel said in his theory that people work to "actualise" themselves through a process he called "self-actualisation." However, Hegel argued that people do not immediately realise who they are in the world; rather, they constantly run into barriers and constraints that prevent them from

doing so. These barriers, which Hegel referred to as “oppositions,” occur when the outside world operates against a person by “shutting out their existence” and keeping them from reaching self-realisation. According to Hegel, these oppositions and negations take place in the world when people are compelled to work as slaves, live in poverty, become ill unexpectedly, or suffer losses and setbacks that seem to negate their existence. Hegel was maybe the first to recognise that people might perceive their actions as something outside of themselves—something that is “not self,” using the ideas of opposition and negation. He called this point in the human experience “alienation.” Hegel was among the first philosophers to grasp the idea that people can perceive themselves as not entirely human and therefore, they can exist in this world without ever reaching complete development. By expressing the fragmentation of human experience and the lack of control associated with contemporary society, the idea that humans could perceive themselves as incomplete or not completely developed was altogether new and fit the experience of modernism (Morrison, 2006).

14.4 Feuerbach’s Idea of Religious Alienation

Feuerbach has explored the idea of alienation from a religious point of view. Feuerbach understands that embracing a historical version of religion and God has distanced humanity from their true essence. Submitting the outcome of any action to an external entity that lies beyond human grasp does not constitute genuine thought. Submitting oneself to an external deity is misguided. He views God as a manifestation and expression of the inherent nature of humanity. The very essence of humanity intertwines with God, not making it an external entity. God is not separate from humanity. Thus, Feuerbach argues that the belief in an external God leads to the alienation of individuals. The essence of all faiths, in his view, revolves around humanity. Genuine spirituality embodies the connection or harmony between individuals and their true selves. We should see God and man as interconnected, rather than separate entities. According to him, people mistakenly attribute their personalities to an external God. God is in the actual creation of man. This wrong attribution of human traits to God reflects an alienation from our true selves. Feuerbach is a philosopher who critiques Christian religious beliefs and seeks to uncover the true essence of humanity and religion. Feuerbach stands out as the sole thinker who has provided a thorough and critical analysis of Hegel’s philosophy. Hegel suggests that consciousness reaches absolute knowledge through the dialectical method, but Feuerbach critiques Hegel’s philosophy by asserting that this notion of absolute spirit does not refer to a conscious absolute

spirit. Instead, it pertains to the self-consciousness of human beings or the essence of humanity itself. Feuerbach believes that humanity serves as both the subject and object of history (Debnath, 2021).

Feuerbach asserts that religion is equivalent to man's understanding of his nature. Feuerbach attempts to establish a religious understanding in his work, *The Essence of Christianity*. He attempts to prove that man is the key to religion. Feuerbach defined true religion as a person's relationship with himself or his nature. Feuerbach states, "The essence of religion is the identity of the divine being with the human;" Feuerbach says, "If this essence is viewed as more truly belonging to God, then man is deprived of it. Man is separated from himself and becomes alienated." According to Feuerbach Christian theology and religious consciousness are the psychological and historical culmination of self-alienation. Thus, under the influence of religion, man becomes alienated from his essence (Morrison, 2006).

14.5 The Division of Labour and Alienated Labour

One of the main characteristics of contemporary capitalist society is the division of labour, or economic and occupational specialisation, which has gradually changed over time. The division of labour divides workers and sectors into distinct areas of increasingly specialised employment. Adam Smith was an active supporter of free-market capitalism in the eighteenth century. He highlighted the material advantages of trade based on the division of labour and occupational specialisation. In contrast, Marx emphasises its negative effects. Marx contends that people are capable of a wide range of tasks and possess a wide variety of creative interests. However, due to the reified and objectified structure of capitalism, the division of labour restricts each individual from performing the specialised activity for which they have the most use value in the capital production process.

The division of labour may appear necessary to ensure the effective employment of labour to produce the enormous number of commodities required to meet consumer demand, as well as to distribute responsibility and competence for the numerous complicated occupations that society must perform. However, Marx wants to view it differently. According to him, the division of labour dehumanises both society and the individual. Marx argues that the commodification of labour leads to alienation or alienated labour. Therefore, the economic and social structure of capitalism, as well as its production goals and process lead to alienated labour (Dillon, 2014).

14.6 Marx's Theory of Human Nature

For Marx, human potential does not take social and historical factors into account is wrong; taking them into account is not the same as being without a conception of human nature. It simply complicates this conception. Marx posits that while there exists a general human potential, its modification in each historical epoch holds greater significance. Marx often used the term “species being” to refer to our general human potential. By this, he meant the potentials and powers that are uniquely human and that distinguish humans from other species (Ritzer, 2012).

It is essential to examine Marx's idea of human nature to properly understand his theory of alienation. Marx emphasised in several of his writings that humans build relationships with the material world outside of themselves by defining themselves in nature and history, primarily via their labouring activities. Marx held that labour was so fundamental to human existence. In this regard, he maintained that humans were characterised by their labour. He argued that labour enables people to exercise power over nature and thus, feel themselves to be active rather than passive in history. Labour is the source of human existence since it creates material needs like clothing, food, and shelter—all of which are essential for survival. Finally, he opined that labour is a component of human self-definition since it allows people to maintain their lives, take charge of their situations, and actively feel validated in their existence (Aron, 2017).

14.7 Theory of Alienation: Karl Marx

Marx criticised Feuerbach for not going far enough after reading Feuerbach's ‘Essence of Christianity’, even if he had assumed that religious alienation had its roots in material activity, which was a positive step. He began by pointing out that Feuerbach had misidentified the human “religious essence with the abstract human individual.” Eventually, Marx criticised Feuerbach's abstract idea of religious alienation lacking a specific material source in social or economic action. Historically, Marx first outlined his theory of alienation in a work entitled *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, which was written in 1844. Marx argued that human history possesses a dual aspect: it reflects both the growing mastery of humanity over nature and a history of the increasing alienation of human beings. Marx examined the distinctive nature of our relationship with our labour within the framework of capitalism. We no longer perceive

our employment as a manifestation of our purpose. There is no objectivity. Instead, we work for the capitalist who employs and compensates us. In capitalism, labour is not an end in itself but rather a means to an end. Marx's basic focus was on the capitalist structures that cause alienation. Marx uses the concept of alienation to illustrate the adverse effects of capitalist production on individuals and society. To Marx, all major institutional spheres in a capitalist society, such as religion, the state, and political economy, were marked by a condition of alienation. Marx identified four forms of alienation: (i) alienation from the product; (ii) alienation from productive activity; (iii) alienation from fellow humans; and (iv) alienation from human potential (Dillon, 2014).

14.7.1 Alienation from the Product

The first type of alienation addressed by Marx is alienation from product. According to Marx, this occurs when people have no control over their products and become estranged from them. In a feudal society, people carry out production for survival, which means they immediately consume the product to meet their material needs rather than circulating it for purchase and sale. Because their work has immediate use value that is directly theirs, and they consume it to meet their financial requirements, workers establish relationships with their products just by their material labour (Aron, 2017). In this case, the product of labour directly satisfies their material needs and this sustains their life and existence. Furthermore, what the labourer produces in feudal society not only has immediate use value, but it affirms their relationship to themselves in their productive powers. In modern society, however, the situation is the opposite. First of all, production is produced for trade rather than for immediate use, and the labour of the worker must be sold on the market. Workers experience alienation or estrangement from the products of their work. In capitalist society, their labour and the outcomes of their labour exist outside of them, both literally and in terms of ownership. The labour of a worker is not their own; it is considered "forced labour", and it belongs to the employer.

Similarly, the employer, who sells the product, and the consumer, who purchases it, own the outcomes of the worker's labour instead of the worker. The goods that workers produce are not available for their use, even though they have made them; they can only get them by buying. As a result, the outcome of a worker's efforts transforms into a force that exists outside the worker. Instead of serving as a straightforward representation of how a worker transforms raw materials into a new product that they can access, their labour turns into an entity that exists for someone else's use in the market. They cannot use the products of their labour to satisfy their

needs. It becomes something separate from the worker, exists independently and feels alien to them. It turns into a force that challenges him on its own. Marx describes this process as the objectification of labour. The output generated by a worker's efforts holds sway over the worker; they are compelled to produce an increasing quantity of goods, yet the benefits of this extra labour go to the capitalist instead of the worker (Morrison, 2006).

Marx believed that this occurs in two different ways. First, due to the mediation of an ownership system that forces workers to sell their labour to the capitalist in exchange for wages, workers no longer own or have control over their labour as they did in feudal society. Second, as a result of the fact that the product enters into the system of exchange, the product creates no use value for the worker either in the form of direct subsistence or self-definition.

14.7.2 Alienation from Productive Activity

Marx discusses alienation from productive activity as the second form of alienation. In this type of alienation, human beings lose control over the capacity of their labour activities to affirm themselves and define their self-existence. To understand Marx's meaning behind this term, we should examine a concept he often employs in his writings, known as 'social relation'. Historically, Marx primarily uses the term 'social relation' to describe the relationship between the individual and the outer world during the labour process. Marx argued that human beings are fundamentally connected to their existence and the external world through their labour activity. In this sense, labour connects individuals to existence in two broad ways: first, it connects them to themselves, providing self-affirmation through material satisfaction; second, it connects them to others and the social world, forming relations with history and society.

From this perspective, we can view every relationship that human labour creates from two distinct perspectives: with itself and with external entities (Coser, 2006). According to Marx, alienation from productive activity disrupts the worker's bond with the self-affirming and self-defining components of their labouring activity in three main ways. Firstly, the worker's labour becomes external to them during the workday, as it belongs to someone else and is sold for a wage. Marx argues that workers are forced to sell their labour to the capitalists in exchange for a wage and are unable to dispose of it as they see fit. In this situation, the worker's labour does not "affirm" them, as they no longer have control over their labouring activity.

Second, alienating workers from productive activities reverses their relationships with themselves and their productive abilities. Since the product of labour becomes the

medium of exchange, the worker's labour does not directly satisfy their material desires, as it did in feudal society. According to Marx, this transforms the worker's activity into nothing more than a means to satisfy their human need, so that the sole purpose of life becomes that of fulfilling needs. This process alienates individuals from the potential of their labour to define their essential being, as the capitalist system performs labour solely to meet immediate economic necessities. Under these conditions, the labourer can only conceptualise work as originating from internal necessities and thus engage in it exclusively to satisfy their physical requirements.

Third, workers' relationship with their physical bodies is reversed when they are alienated from productive activities. Only the functions that workers share with animals, such as eating, sleeping, drinking, and reproducing, are unrestricted in capitalism, whereas in feudal societies, productive activity defined the sphere of free action in all functions. Therefore, because "what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal," workers who perform human tasks feel like animals. They can no longer dispose of their work as easily as they could if it were their private property, people in this situation feel estranged from their physical bodies. The worker's defining relationship to themselves and their powers reverses when their productive activity no longer belongs to them. In this situation, the worker can no longer rely on their activity for their life (Morrison, 2006).

14.7.3 Alienation from Fellow Humans

Marx identified a third form of alienation—alienation from other people and the human social community. Marx assumed that people fundamentally need and want to cooperate to obtain from nature what they need to survive. However, within capitalist systems, this cooperation is disrupted, and individuals are forced to work in proximity for the benefit of the capitalist. In an industrial system, the nature of the technology engenders a significant degree of isolation (Adams & Sydnie, 2001). Nevertheless, in this social context, workers experience a phenomenon more detrimental than mere isolation. Workers are frequently compelled into overt competition, and conflict with one another. To maximize productivity and impede the development of cooperative relationships, the capitalist creates competition among workers to determine who can produce more (Ritzer, 2012). Marx reasoned that this occurs when economic relationships and transactions transform all social relations, making competition the sole purpose of existence. Alienation from other people occurs in two distinct ways. Firstly, industrial capitalism forces people to compete as private individuals, isolated and separate from one another, to pursue their interests and financial advantage. Second, alienation from fellow human beings occurs when society solely benefits one

class from their labour. Marx argued that during earlier periods of history, the product of individual labour was once used directly to provide material needs and sustain life, whereas now it is used to benefit only one class that can realise itself in history (Abraham & Morgan, 1989).

In Marx's perspective, this form of alienation disrupts the social relation that human beings have with one another as part of the human social community. This disruption has occurred in two significant ways. First, as individuals are isolated from one another through private competition, they are transformed from collective beings into isolated individual entities. As universal competition becomes prevalent, individuals consequently find themselves isolated within society. Second, alienation from fellow human beings occurs as only one class in society becomes the sole beneficiary of the product of labour (Morrison, 2006).

14.7.4 Alienation from Species Being

Marx discusses alienation from the human species as the last form of alienation. Marx's theory of alienation from species posits that individuals experience alienation from both their own species' activities and species-being. Marx posited that due to humans' active relationship with the external world, they possess human characteristics that distinguish them from other animals. Fundamentally, he contended that the primary characteristic differentiating humans from animals was what he termed a "conscious mental being." He asserted that this pertained to the capacity for self-reflection and self-awareness (Dillon, 2014). Thus, Marx argued that species alienation undermines the connection that humans have with their conscious mental being in two essential ways: first, it negated the advantage that nature had conferred upon humans over animal life by transforming conscious beings into physical beings during labour. Second, it reduced human labour to that of animals by transforming conscious beings into physical beings and elevating physical beings above mental beings. In this form of alienation, individuals become products of their physical existence and activities, which turns human nature against itself. Alienated labour deprives work of its inherent human significance and its capacity to express human creativity. Through this process, their work reduces them to functioning like machines, individuals perform less and less like human beings. Progressive control over relations with other humans and nature numbs and ultimately destroys consciousness and becomes estranged from the very characteristics that define their humanity (Ritzer, 2012).

Marx believed that alienation from species breaks the existing relationship with the species by transforming all experiences into individual experiences that are isolated and separate from the species. In this sense, alienation from species beings reverses

the advantage nature bestows upon the species, as it transforms human consciousness and mental beings into solitary physical entities (Morrison, 2006).

14.8 Critical Appraisal

Marxian concept of alienation has been criticised on several grounds. These are the following:

1. Some critics argue that the Marxian concept of alienation is too broad and encompasses too many different aspects of human experience.
2. Some argue that the Marxian concept of alienation is not clearly defined and is often used ambiguously.
3. Many critics argue that Marx disregards all facets of existence by focusing just on labour in the capitalist system.
4. Some critics argue that the Marxian theory of alienation is too pessimistic and neglects the possibility of human flourishing in capitalist society.
5. Some commentators argue that the explanation lacked clarity regarding its implications and potential elimination strategies. The solution to communism has not yet materialised and does not appear to be a likely prospect in the near future.
6. Existentialists argue that Marx neglects the fundamental freedom and responsibility of human beings.
7. Feminist scholars argue that the theory of alienation neglects the experiences of women and other marginalised groups. Additionally, they argue that Marx's theory of alienation fails to account for how capitalist societies are shaped by patriarchal and other forms of oppression.

14.9 Conclusion

The term alienation cannot be found in Marx's later writings; however, contemporary scholars are in error when they assert that Marx abandoned the concept. It continues to inform his subsequent works, particularly *Das Kapital*. Marx consistently applies the concept of alienation to the notion of the "fetishism of commodities," which is fundamental to his economic analysis. Commodities are the alienated product of the labour of workers. The concept of alienation remained integral to Marx's social and

economic analysis. In an alienated society, the collective consciousness of individuals is predominantly a reflection of the conditions in which they find themselves and of their respective positions within the production process.

14.10 Summary

Karl Marx significantly influenced the concept of alienation, which emerged as a prominent topic in the twentieth century from earlier philosophical discussions, particularly those of Georg Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. Hegel introduced the concept of alienation in the context of self-realisation and the barriers individuals face in achieving their true potential. He argued that social forces can lead to a sense of alienation. Feuerbach expanded on this by critiquing religious beliefs. He suggested that the belief in an external God alienates individuals from their true essence. He posited that God is a reflection of human nature. According to him, true spirituality arises from the harmony between individuals and their true selves. In his work in 1844, “The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,”.

Marx articulated his theory of alienation. Marx examined the distinctive nature of our relationship with our labour within the framework of capitalism. In capitalism, labour is not an end in itself but rather a means to an end. Marx’s basic focus was on the capitalist structures that cause alienation. Marx uses the concept of alienation to illustrate the adverse effects of capitalist production on individuals and society. He identifies four forms of alienation within capitalist society: alienation from products, productive activity, fellow humans, and species beings. He argued that by separating workers from their products, their labour, and their social relations, capitalism transforms labour into a means to an end. Alienation reduces individuals to mere components in a system. Therefore, capitalism undermines their conscious mental state and creativity. The term alienation cannot be found in Marx’s later writings, however, the concept of alienation remained central to Marx’s social and economic analysis.

14.11 Questions

1. Briefly discuss the term ‘Estrangement’ after Hegel. (5)
2. Elucidate the concept of religious alienation of Feuerbach. (10)
3. What do you mean by alienation? Briefly discuss the different forms of alienation after Karl Marx. (10)

4. Do you think the capitalist system is the primary source of alienation? Justify your answer. (10)
5. Critically evaluate the theory of human nature after Karl Marx. (5)
6. How do workers are alienated from their fellow human beings in capitalist society? (5)

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MODULE - IV
Max Weber

Unit 15 □ Methodology: Verstehen and Ideal Types

Structure

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15.1 Learning Objectives

- Understand Weber's *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types* as core concepts in social science methodology.
- Analyse the *Methodenstreit* and Weber's role in reconciling the historical and classical schools.
- Evaluate the relationship between facts and values in the natural and social sciences.

15.2 Introduction

Max Weber's contributions to the methodology of the social sciences represent a critical turning point in the development of sociological theory. As the social sciences

began to distinguish themselves from the natural sciences at the turn of the 20th century, Weber emerged as one of the most influential figures in shaping the methodology that would guide the study of human society. His work addressed several foundational questions about the nature of social inquiry, particularly the relationship between the natural and social sciences and the distinct methodologies required for each. At the heart of his approach lies the distinction between the objective study of the physical world and the interpretive study of human action. This distinction is crucial in understanding his two major methodological innovations: *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) and the concept of *Ideal Types*.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a period of tremendous success for the natural sciences. Disciplines such as physics, biology, and chemistry had made enormous strides in explaining the natural world through the use of observation, experimentation, and the identification of universal laws. The success of these sciences elevated their methods, particularly their empirical and positivist approaches, to a position of great authority. As a result, the scientific method, characterized by systematic observation, experimentation, and the formulation of laws, became the gold standard for all academic disciplines, including the social sciences. However, the study of society and human behavior presents a significant challenge to this approach. Social phenomena are not governed by the same laws as natural events; rather, they are shaped by subjective meanings, values, and motivations that vary across different cultures and historical periods. This raised an essential question: How could social sciences be considered legitimate sciences, and how could they develop methods that would provide valid knowledge of society in a way that was distinct from the natural sciences?

Weber's response to this challenge was rooted in his belief that human actions are not merely the product of external causes but are instead motivated by the meanings that individuals attach to their actions. Unlike natural phenomena, which can be studied by observing external, measurable characteristics, social phenomena are shaped by human agency, intentions, and values. Therefore, Weber argued that the social sciences could not simply replicate the methods of the natural sciences; they required a distinct methodology that could account for the complexity of human behavior and the role of values in shaping social action. In his view, social scientists must strive to understand not just the observable behaviors of individuals but the subjective meanings and motivations behind those behaviors, as well as the broader social and historical contexts in which they occur.

Central to Weber's methodological approach are the concepts of *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types*. *Verstehen*, often translated as "interpretive understanding," is a method

by which sociologists seek to understand social action by interpreting the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions. This approach goes beyond merely observing behaviors; it requires an empathetic engagement with the actor's perspective, allowing the researcher to comprehend the intentions and values that underlie their actions. For Weber, *Verstehen* is an essential tool for understanding the rich, complex nature of human behavior. It encourages the researcher to enter the world of the individual, to consider how they see and make sense of their actions, and to interpret those actions in light of the cultural and social frameworks that shape them.

In addition to *Verstehen*, Weber developed the concept of *Ideal Types* as a methodological tool to facilitate the study of complex social phenomena. *Ideal Types* are abstract, simplified models that highlight certain key characteristics or features of a social reality. These models do not attempt to describe the world in its entirety but instead focus on specific aspects of social life that are important for comparison and analysis. An *Ideal Type* is a conceptual construct, a “pure” model, that emphasizes certain traits or patterns that can be used to contrast and compare different social phenomena. Weber's *Ideal Types* are not intended to be accurate descriptions of actual social realities, but rather, they serve as analytical tools that allow scholars to make sense of the complexity of social life by focusing on certain idealized characteristics. For example, Weber's *Ideal Type* of bureaucracy is a theoretical model that emphasizes rational-legal authority, hierarchical structures, and impersonal rules as the defining features of bureaucratic organizations. This *Ideal Type* does not represent a specific bureaucratic institution but provides a framework for analyzing the key elements that characterize bureaucratic systems across different historical and cultural contexts.

Together, *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types* form the core of Weber's interpretive sociology, a methodology that seeks to understand social action by considering both the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions and the broader social structures in which those actions occur. These concepts offer a means of bridging the gap between individual agency and social structure, allowing scholars to explore the underlying dynamics of social life. *Verstehen* emphasizes the need to understand the actor's perspective, while *Ideal Types* provide a framework for comparing and analyzing social phenomena in their most generalized form. Both are indispensable tools for sociologists who seek to understand the complexity of human society.

Weber's methodology is particularly important in the context of the broader philosophical and scientific debates of his time. In the late 19th and early 20th

centuries, there was a growing concern about the legitimacy of the social sciences as a distinct and scientific field of study. The rise of positivism, which emphasized the importance of empirical observation and the search for general laws in the natural sciences, led to a growing belief that the social sciences should adopt the same methods. However, Weber rejected this view, arguing that social sciences could not be reduced to the same methods used in the natural sciences. His distinction between the “nomothetic” (law-giving) methods of the natural sciences and the “ideographic” (individualizing) methods of the social sciences was crucial in establishing the legitimacy of sociology as a discipline with its own unique methodology.

Weber’s engagement with the broader intellectual climate of his time was influenced by the *Methodenstreit* (methodological dispute) between different schools of thought, particularly the conflict between the historical school of economics and the classical school. The historical school, led by figures like Gustav Schmoller, emphasized the importance of understanding social phenomena in their historical and cultural context, arguing that the natural sciences’ focus on general laws could not adequately capture the complexity of human behavior. In response, Weber developed his own approach to the social sciences, building on the work of philosophers such as Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, who had emphasized the importance of values in shaping human action and the need for a distinct methodology for the social sciences.

In this context, *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types* emerge as Weber’s contributions to resolving the methodological dilemmas facing the social sciences. *Verstehen* allows for a deeper understanding of the meanings and intentions behind social actions, while *Ideal Types* provide a framework for comparing and analyzing the complex and varied forms of social organization and behavior. Weber’s methodology offers a way to study society that takes into account both the subjective experiences of individuals and the objective social structures in which they are embedded.

This unit will explore these two central concepts in detail, examining their theoretical foundations, their applications in sociological research, and their relevance to contemporary social science. By understanding Weber’s approach to *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types*, students will gain a deeper insight into the nature of social action and the methods required to study the complex and dynamic processes that shape human society. Through this exploration, students will be equipped to critically engage with Weber’s methodology and to apply these concepts in their own sociological inquiries, whether in qualitative or interpretative research (Morrison, 2006)

15.3 Wilhelm Windelband and the Distinction Between the Natural and Social Sciences

Wilhelm Windelband's critique of the natural sciences represents a pivotal moment in the development of the methodological foundations of the social sciences. His engagement with the question of how knowledge about the social world could be scientifically obtained was rooted in his criticism of the assumptions underlying the natural sciences, particularly their approach to understanding reality. Windelband, a key figure in the Neo-Kantian movement, argued that while the natural sciences had achieved tremendous success in explaining the material world through laws and causal relationships, these methods were insufficient for studying the social and historical domains. He believed that the methods of the natural sciences could not adequately address the unique nature of human experience, society, and history, and he proposed that a new approach, more attuned to the complexities of social life, was necessary.

Windelband's criticism was grounded in his broader philosophical stance, particularly his reading of Immanuel Kant's work. According to Kant, the natural sciences could achieve objective knowledge by following a specific method that involved observing external phenomena, formulating laws, and generalizing across various instances of observed facts. However, Kant had excluded the historical and ethical dimensions of human action from the realm of legitimate scientific inquiry. Windelband, in contrast, argued that human history and ethical action should also be subject to scientific investigation. His critique of Kant centered on the philosopher's dismissal of historical phenomena as objects of legitimate knowledge. For Windelband, this was a significant shortcoming, as he believed that human societies and cultures could and should be studied scientifically, even if they could not be reduced to the same laws as natural phenomena.

In his work, Windelband attempted to resolve the tension between the natural sciences and the human sciences, which he saw as rooted in different forms of knowledge. He posited that the natural sciences and the social sciences were distinct in both their subject matter and their methods. Natural sciences, Windelband argued, deal with empirical facts that can be observed and measured, aiming to find general laws that apply universally. This approach, he suggested, is suited to the study of the natural world, where phenomena repeat in predictable patterns and can be explained through causal relationships. For example, in physics or chemistry, the same laws apply across

different contexts and times, and scientific inquiry aims to uncover these universal principles.

On the other hand, Windelband argued that the social sciences, including history and sociology, focus on human actions, which are inherently unique and context-dependent. Human beings are not governed by universal laws in the same way that natural phenomena are; rather, they act based on values, beliefs, and intentions that vary across time, culture, and social context. Because of this, Windelband contended, the social sciences must adopt an approach that emphasizes the individual and the unique nature of human experience, rather than seeking generalizable laws. He called this approach the *idiographic* method, in contrast to the *nomothetic* method used in the natural sciences.

While the natural sciences seek to identify and apply general laws, the social sciences, Windelband argued, must focus on the unique, individual events that make up human history and social life. He proposed that the goal of the social sciences was to understand specific historical events, social practices, and cultural phenomena in their particularity, not to reduce them to abstract generalizations. Windelband's *idiographic* method was designed to capture the individuality and historical specificity of human life. Unlike the *nomothetic* approach, which seeks to generalize from a set of observations, the *idiographic* approach involves the careful study of particular events or phenomena in their context, aiming to provide an accurate and nuanced description of the unique features of the social world.

Windelband's critique also extended to the role of values in the study of society. In the natural sciences, the goal is to remain neutral and objective, with facts being observed and described without reference to personal values. However, Windelband believed that the social sciences could not adopt the same detached approach because human action is always guided by values. Social scientists, he argued, must recognize that the subjects of their study—human beings—are not neutral but are inherently value-laden, driven by their cultural, ethical, and social beliefs. Thus, the social sciences must be mindful of the values that shape both the actions of individuals and the perspectives of researchers.

Furthermore, Windelband's ideas were influenced by the crisis in the legitimacy of historical and social sciences during the late 19th century. As the natural sciences gained dominance, the social sciences were increasingly viewed as speculative and lacking in scientific rigor. Windelband sought to remedy this by proposing a methodology that recognized the uniqueness of human social action while still adhering

to a scientific approach. In his view, the study of human societies and cultures required a methodology that could accommodate the richness and complexity of human life without resorting to overly simplistic generalizations or speculative interpretations. His work sought to establish the social sciences as legitimate fields of study, capable of producing valid knowledge, albeit through a method that was distinct from that used in the natural sciences.

One of Windelband's most significant contributions to the discussion of methodology was his distinction between the two types of knowledge: one associated with the natural sciences and the other with the historical and social sciences. He believed that the natural sciences are concerned with the study of laws that govern recurring phenomena in the natural world, while the social sciences are concerned with the study of individual, non-recurring events that are shaped by human values and historical context. This distinction laid the foundation for a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between different branches of scientific inquiry and helped establish the social sciences as a distinct discipline.

Windelband's criticism of the natural sciences also had a profound impact on the way in which social scientists approached their work. His emphasis on the individuality of historical events and the role of values in shaping human action challenged the prevailing positivist methodologies of his time. Rather than seeking to apply the methods of the natural sciences to the study of society, Windelband's work encouraged scholars to develop a more interpretive, context-sensitive approach to understanding human behavior. His ideas laid the groundwork for the development of interpretive sociology, a tradition that would later be advanced by scholars like Max Weber, who would draw heavily on Windelband's distinction between the *nomothetic* and *idiographic* approaches.

In summary, Wilhelm Windelband's critique of the natural sciences was a pivotal moment in the development of social science methodology. He argued that while the natural sciences could explain the regularities of the material world through general laws, the social sciences required a different approach that could account for the uniqueness and contextuality of human action. By distinguishing between the *nomothetic* and *idiographic* methods, Windelband helped to establish a framework for the social sciences that recognized the complexity of human behavior and the role of values in shaping social life. His work was instrumental in establishing the legitimacy of the social sciences and in shaping the methodology of sociology and history in the 20th century (Morrison, 2006).

15.4 Heinrich Rickert: Knowledge, Value Relevance, and the Distinction between Natural and Social Sciences

Heinrich Rickert, a student of Wilhelm Windelband and a contemporary of Max Weber, made significant contributions to the theory of knowledge in the social and historical sciences. Born in Danzig in 1863, Rickert taught at Freiburg, where he developed a close relationship with Weber. By 1896, Rickert replaced Windelband at Heidelberg, and it was there that he made some of his most influential contributions to the philosophy of science. His work focused on the nature of knowledge in the social sciences and how it differs from the methods employed in the natural sciences.

Rickert is best known for developing a theory of knowledge that was valid both logically and methodologically. His theory was a response to the growing debate over the nature of scientific knowledge, particularly in the context of the natural and social sciences. As mentioned earlier, Rickert was influenced by the Neo-Kantian movement, which sought to address the crisis in the legitimacy of the social and historical sciences by reevaluating the relationship between science and philosophy. In his work, Rickert began by examining how the natural sciences understood their relationship to empirical reality. He assumed that the natural sciences, such as physics and biology, understood knowledge as the result of a straightforward observational encounter with the natural world. From this perspective, knowledge was seen as a simple accumulation of facts drawn from the physical world. However, Rickert argued that this view was incomplete in several respects. He believed that the natural sciences, in their pursuit of objective knowledge, overlooked the role of judgment in the process of observation and knowledge formation. For Rickert, the act of observation was never neutral; it always involved a form of judgment that shaped the way reality was understood.

Rickert's insight was that knowledge is not simply a passive reception of facts from the empirical world. Instead, knowledge is an active process that is shaped by human judgment, which precedes and guides the act of knowing. This was a significant departure from the view held by many in the natural sciences, who believed that knowledge was a direct and unbiased reflection of reality. According to Rickert, the natural sciences' reliance on observation alone was insufficient because it neglected the role of human judgment in interpreting the world.

This understanding of knowledge had profound implications for the social sciences. Rickert argued that the social and historical sciences could not simply adopt the methods of the natural sciences because human social action is not governed by fixed laws in the same way that natural phenomena are. Social action, Rickert believed, is deeply embedded in values, ethics, and human judgment. Human beings do not act solely based on observable facts but are guided by values, goals, and intentions that are shaped by their cultural and historical context. Therefore, the social sciences must take into account these subjective dimensions of human life, rather than treating social phenomena as if they were analogous to natural events.

One of Rickert's central contributions was his theory of concept formation. He argued that in both the natural and social sciences, knowledge is constructed through the formation of concepts, which help to organize and make sense of the empirical world. However, the way in which concepts are formed in the natural and social sciences is fundamentally different. In the natural sciences, Rickert argued, concepts are reductive in nature. They simplify and generalize the empirical world by focusing on common features that can be observed across different instances. These concepts are designed to capture general laws and regularities in nature. By contrast, in the social sciences, the formation of concepts is more complex and nuanced. Rickert maintained that social scientists must form concepts that are closely tied to the specific historical and cultural context in which they are operating. Social concepts, he argued, must be sensitive to the individuality of historical events and social actions.

Rickert's distinction between the natural and social sciences is rooted in the idea that the objects of study in the social sciences—human beings, societies, cultures—are fundamentally different from the objects of study in the natural sciences. In the natural sciences, the objects of study are physical phenomena that can be observed and measured independently of human judgment. In the social sciences, by contrast, the objects of study are human beings who act in relation to their values, goals, and beliefs. These subjective dimensions of human life cannot be captured by the generalizing methodologies of the natural sciences. Instead, Rickert argued, the social sciences must adopt an approach that focuses on the individual, non-recurring events that constitute human history and social life.

Rickert's work also touched on the concept of value relevance, which became central to his theory of knowledge in the social sciences. Value relevance refers to the idea that human knowledge is always shaped by the values and judgments of

the observer. In the natural sciences, the observer strives to maintain objectivity by excluding personal values from the process of observation. However, in the social sciences, Rickert argued, the observer cannot be entirely neutral because human action is always value-laden. Social scientists, therefore, must acknowledge the role of values in their research, both in the objects they study and in the methods they employ.

In Rickert's view, the objects studied in the social sciences are shaped by human values in a way that objects in the natural sciences are not. While the natural sciences deal with facts that are independent of human judgment, the social sciences deal with phenomena that are inherently tied to human values. Human beings act in relation to what they value, and these values shape the social world in profound ways. As a result, the social sciences must be attentive to the ways in which values influence social action and the interpretation of historical events.

Rickert's theory of knowledge thus represented a major departure from the positivist outlook that dominated the natural sciences. He rejected the notion that knowledge could be obtained through objective observation alone. Instead, he emphasized the importance of human judgment and values in the process of knowledge formation, particularly in the social sciences. His work laid the groundwork for a more interpretive, context-sensitive approach to understanding human society, one that recognized the complexity and subjectivity of human action.

Furthermore, Rickert's distinction between the natural and social sciences helped to establish the social sciences as legitimate fields of inquiry. By arguing that the social sciences deal with unique, value-laden phenomena that cannot be reduced to general laws, Rickert contributed to the development of a methodology that was distinct from that of the natural sciences. His work provided a foundation for the development of historical and sociological research that would later be advanced by thinkers like Max Weber.

Heinrich Rickert's contributions to the theory of knowledge in the social and historical sciences were crucial in shaping the methodological foundations of these disciplines. His insights into the role of judgment, concept formation, and value relevance helped to establish a framework for the social sciences that recognized the uniqueness of human action and the importance of values in shaping social life. His work remains a key reference point for scholars in the social sciences who seek to understand the complex relationship between knowledge, values, and human action (Morrison, 2006).

15.5 The Distinction between Sciences of Facts and Sciences of Values in Social and Natural Sciences

In the context of the ongoing debates between the natural and social sciences, Heinrich Rickert's theory of knowledge takes on a central role, particularly in the discussion surrounding the dichotomy of *facts* versus *values*. Rickert's contribution to the philosophy of science involves a radical rethinking of how knowledge is constructed and how it can be understood across different scientific disciplines. This distinction, which he terms the divide between the "sciences of fact" and the "sciences of value," addresses a critical issue that arose in the intellectual climate of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—namely, how knowledge in the social sciences could be legitimized as scientific knowledge, distinct from the empirical methods of the natural sciences.

Rickert begins by examining the assumptions underlying the natural sciences. In these disciplines, knowledge is primarily concerned with facts, which are considered objective, observable, and independent of human interpretation. The natural sciences, according to Rickert, operate with a "generalizing" methodology, aiming to uncover universal laws that apply across various instances and contexts. The object of study in the natural sciences is the empirical world, and the methods used to gather knowledge are those that observe, categorize, and seek regularities in the physical realm. The empirical facts uncovered by the natural sciences are not influenced by the observer's personal values but are understood to be universal truths about the natural world.

However, Rickert questions the adequacy of this purely empirical approach when it comes to the study of human societies and history. He argues that while the natural sciences are concerned with "law-like" regularities, the social sciences deal with phenomena that are inherently subjective and value-laden. Human beings do not act solely in response to objective facts but are influenced by values, beliefs, and motivations. These values are deeply embedded in the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which individuals live. As a result, knowledge in the social sciences cannot be derived simply from the observation of facts in the same way as in the natural sciences.

In Rickert's view, the distinction between the natural and social sciences goes beyond the mere subject matter of each field—it is also about the nature of the knowledge that each discipline seeks to produce. While the natural sciences produce knowledge that is objective, abstract, and generalizable, the social sciences are concerned with knowledge that is specific, subjective, and shaped by human values. The social sciences,

therefore, cannot adopt the same methods used in the natural sciences because the objects of study—human beings and their social actions—are always influenced by values, which cannot be reduced to empirical facts.

Rickert's distinction is captured in his concept of the *science of facts* versus the *science of values*. The sciences of facts, such as the natural sciences, seek knowledge that is independent of human judgment and values. The knowledge produced in these fields is objective and based on observable phenomena. On the other hand, the sciences of values—such as sociology, history, and ethics—are concerned with understanding human actions, which are always guided by values. The objects of study in the social sciences cannot be separated from the values that motivate them, and knowledge of these objects must, therefore, take into account the role of values in shaping human behavior.

This distinction between facts and values is crucial because it underscores the limitations of applying the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences. In the natural sciences, the goal is to uncover general laws that apply universally to all instances of a phenomenon. These laws are objective and independent of the values or perspectives of the researcher. In contrast, the social sciences are concerned with understanding individual, non-recurring events and the ways in which values shape human actions. Human behavior is not governed by universal laws but by cultural, ethical, and personal values that vary across time and space. As a result, social scientists must adopt methods that are sensitive to the context and values of the people they study.

Rickert's argument that knowledge in the social sciences is inseparable from values also has profound implications for the role of the researcher. In the natural sciences, the researcher is often portrayed as a neutral observer who gathers data without being influenced by personal biases or values. However, in the social sciences, the researcher cannot be entirely neutral because the objects of study—human beings and their social actions—are shaped by values. Social scientists must acknowledge that their own values and judgments are part of the research process, as they are interpreting social phenomena through their own cultural and ethical lenses. Rickert's position, therefore, emphasizes the interpretive nature of the social sciences, where knowledge is not simply an objective description of facts but a process of understanding human actions through the lens of values.

This leads to the issue of *value relevance*, a concept that becomes central to Rickert's theory of knowledge. Value relevance refers to the idea that knowledge in the social sciences is always shaped by the values that guide human action. In the natural

sciences, knowledge is concerned with facts that are independent of human values. But in the social sciences, knowledge is always influenced by the values that shape human behavior. The subject matter of the social sciences—human beings, societies, and cultures—cannot be understood apart from the values that inform them. Social scientists must therefore recognize the role of values in shaping their research and the knowledge they produce.

In Rickert's framework, the natural sciences are concerned with general laws and universal facts that can be observed and measured. These laws are applicable across different instances and are not influenced by human values. The social sciences, by contrast, are concerned with individual, non-recurring events that are shaped by human values and cultural contexts. The knowledge produced in the social sciences is therefore more specific and context-dependent. This distinction underscores the complexity of social phenomena, which cannot be reduced to the general laws and regularities that characterize the natural world.

Rickert's views on the relationship between facts and values also highlight the differences in the epistemological foundations of the natural and social sciences. In the natural sciences, knowledge is seen as a process of uncovering objective facts about the world, while in the social sciences, knowledge is understood as a process of interpreting human actions and social structures that are influenced by values. This interpretive approach, Rickert argues, is essential for understanding the complexities of human life and social action. Social scientists must recognize that their research is always influenced by the values of the people they study and the values that shape their own perspectives.

Heinrich Rickert's theory of knowledge in the social and historical sciences represents a significant departure from the positivist outlook that dominated the natural sciences. His distinction between the sciences of facts and the sciences of values provides a framework for understanding the unique nature of social knowledge. While the natural sciences are concerned with objective, generalizable facts, the social sciences are concerned with subjective, value-laden knowledge that seeks to understand human actions and social structures. Rickert's work emphasizes the importance of values in the study of society and the limitations of applying the methods of the natural sciences to the social world. His insights continue to shape contemporary debates in the philosophy of social science, particularly in relation to the role of values and interpretation in social research(Morrison, 2006)

15.6 The Methodenstreit: Debating Methods in the Natural and Social Sciences

The *Methodenstreit* (Methodological Dispute) that arose in the late 19th century represents a key point of intellectual contention regarding the appropriate methods for the social sciences. The debate centered on whether the social sciences should adopt the same empirical and generalizing methods used in the natural sciences or whether they required a distinct approach that recognized the unique nature of human action and social phenomena. This controversy, which was particularly prominent in the field of economics, pitted two primary schools of thought against each other: the historical school, led by figures like Gustav Schmoller, and the classical school, represented by Carl Menger and others. The dispute raised fundamental questions about the legitimacy of the social sciences as a scientific discipline and the methods that could be used to study human behavior, societies, and historical development.

At the heart of the *Methodenstreit* was a disagreement about whether the social sciences should be viewed as “nomothetic”—seeking universal laws and generalizable principles—or “idiographic,” focusing on the unique, individual events and actions that shape human history and social life. The classical school, aligned with the broader tradition of positivism, argued that the social sciences should strive to uncover general laws in the same manner as the natural sciences, using empirical observation and deductive reasoning. For classical economists like Menger, this meant studying human behavior through the lens of economic utility, reducing all human actions to a pursuit of self-interest and measurable economic outcomes. The goal was to identify causal relationships that could explain patterns in economic behavior and social systems.

In contrast, the historical school, championed by Schmoller, rejected the idea that social sciences could rely on the same methods used in the natural sciences. Schmoller and his colleagues argued that human society and history could not be reduced to general laws. Societies are historically contingent and shaped by unique cultural, political, and economic contexts. The historical school emphasized the importance of studying societies in their specific historical contexts, arguing that the diversity and complexity of human experience required a more inductive, context-sensitive approach. This school believed that the social sciences must focus on understanding individual, non-recurring events, rather than seeking universal laws that might oversimplify the rich diversity of human social life.

The dispute had significant implications for the development of the social sciences. Proponents of the historical school believed that general laws could not adequately capture the richness of human society and that the social sciences must engage with history and culture in a more nuanced and detailed way. In this sense, the historical school viewed social phenomena as deeply embedded in time, place, and cultural context, making them resistant to generalization. On the other hand, the classical school's focus on general laws sought to establish the social sciences as a more rigorous and objective discipline by applying the same methodologies used in the natural sciences.

The *Methodenstreit* was not just a theoretical debate about methods but also a reflection of the larger intellectual currents of the time. As the natural sciences gained increasing prominence in the intellectual world, there was growing pressure to apply their methods to the study of society. However, the proponents of the historical school saw the application of the natural sciences' methodologies as inappropriate for the study of human behavior. They argued that social science needed a methodology that was more attuned to the subjectivity of human action, the role of values, and the contingency of historical development.

Max Weber, whose work straddled both traditions, engaged with this debate and ultimately contributed to its resolution by developing a methodological framework that recognized both the importance of general principles and the uniqueness of individual social phenomena. Weber's concept of *Ideal Types* was a crucial tool in reconciling these two approaches. The *Ideal Type*, as an analytical tool, allowed for the comparison of social phenomena in their purest, most generalized form while acknowledging the specific historical and cultural contexts in which they arose. By using *Ideal Types*, Weber aimed to highlight the distinctive characteristics of social institutions and behaviors without reducing them to simplistic general laws.

In his own work, Weber sought to avoid the extremes of both the historical school and the classical school. He agreed with the historical school that social phenomena could not be understood by merely applying the methods of the natural sciences. However, he also believed that the social sciences should aim to develop general principles that could help explain patterns in social action, as long as these principles were recognized as idealized models, not absolute laws. This approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena—one that could appreciate the complexity of individual social actions while still offering conceptual frameworks for comparative analysis.

Weber's method was also grounded in his concept of *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding), which emphasized the importance of understanding the subjective meanings behind human actions. According to Weber, the social sciences must take into account the motivations, intentions, and values of individuals, which are often not observable in the same way as physical phenomena. This interpretive approach provided a counterpoint to the more reductionist methods of the classical school, offering a way to study the individual within the broader social and historical context.

The *Methodenstreit* represents a critical moment in the development of the social sciences, as it forced scholars to grapple with fundamental questions about the nature of social knowledge, the appropriate methods for studying society, and the relationship between the social and natural sciences. The debate between the historical school and the classical school over the applicability of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of society ultimately led to a more sophisticated understanding of the social sciences. Weber's synthesis of these approaches, through the use of *Ideal Types* and *Verstehen*, laid the groundwork for a methodology that could capture the complexity of human society while still maintaining a rigorous and scientific approach to social inquiry (Morrison, 2006).

15.7 Max Weber's contributions to the *Methodenstreit*

Max Weber's contributions to the *Methodenstreit*—the methodological controversy between different schools of thought in the social sciences—were significant in shaping the course of social science methodology. Weber's work addressed key issues raised during the dispute between the historical school of economics, led by figures like Gustav Schmoller, and the classical school, represented by Carl Menger and others. At the heart of this debate was the question of whether social science should adopt the same methods used in the natural sciences, or whether it required a distinctive approach that recognized the unique characteristics of human behavior, values, and social structures.

Weber's engagement with this controversy was rooted in his commitment to defining a scientific approach to the social sciences that would not simply mimic the methods of the natural sciences but also respect the subjective nature of social phenomena. While Weber agreed with the historical school that the social sciences could not adopt the generalizing methods of the natural sciences, he also recognized the need for social science to develop systematic methods that could provide valid knowledge. He aimed to find a middle ground between the extreme positions of the historical school,

which emphasized the uniqueness and specificity of each historical event, and the classical school, which sought to apply the scientific methods of natural science to social phenomena.

One of Weber's key contributions to the methodological controversy was his argument that the social sciences are distinct from the natural sciences not just because of their subject matter, but because of the different types of knowledge they seek to uncover. Weber argued that while the natural sciences aim to identify general laws of nature, the social sciences must focus on understanding individual social actions, which are motivated by values, beliefs, and intentions. Human behavior, Weber asserted, is not governed by laws in the same way that physical phenomena are; rather, it is shaped by meanings that individuals attach to their actions within specific social and historical contexts.

This argument led Weber to develop his methodology of *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding), which emphasized the importance of understanding the subjective meanings behind human actions. For Weber, the task of the social scientist was not to search for universal laws that governed human behavior but to interpret the intentions and motivations of individuals in their specific contexts. This interpretive approach was a direct challenge to the positivist approach of the classical school, which sought to explain social behavior through causal laws and general principles. Weber's use of *Verstehen* allowed social scientists to engage with the social world in a way that took into account the richness and complexity of human experience.

In addition to *Verstehen*, Weber's concept of *Ideal Types* played a crucial role in his methodological framework. *Ideal Types* are abstract models that highlight certain key features of a social phenomenon, which can then be used for comparison and analysis. Unlike the classical school's search for universal laws, *Ideal Types* serve as analytical tools that allow sociologists to focus on the most important features of a social phenomenon without oversimplifying its complexity. Weber's *Ideal Types* were not intended to represent concrete realities but rather to capture the essential characteristics of social phenomena in an idealized form. This approach provided a way for sociologists to compare and analyze different social structures and historical events while acknowledging their unique and context-dependent nature.

Weber's contributions to the methodological controversy also extended to his critique of the idea that the social sciences could be purely objective. He rejected the notion that social science could ever be entirely value-free, arguing that values inevitably influence the way in which social phenomena are studied and interpreted. While

Weber believed that social scientists should strive for objectivity, he recognized that their interpretations would always be shaped by their own cultural and historical context. In this sense, Weber's methodology acknowledged the subjective nature of social inquiry and sought to balance scientific rigor with an understanding of the researcher's role in the interpretive process.

In his methodological writings, Weber also addressed the question of whether the social sciences could ever achieve the same level of certainty as the natural sciences. He rejected the idea that social science could be as exact and predictable as the natural sciences, acknowledging that human behavior is far more complex and contingent than physical phenomena. Instead, Weber argued that the goal of the social sciences should not be to find universal laws but to develop concepts and theories that could help explain the patterns of social action and the historical development of societies. His focus on understanding the meanings behind social actions, rather than seeking general laws, marked a significant departure from the deterministic views of social science that had been popular in the classical tradition.

Weber's contribution to the *Methodenstreit* was not just a theoretical exercise but a practical attempt to develop a methodology that could be applied to the study of social life. His work provided social scientists with a set of tools—*Verstehen*, *Ideal Types*, and a focus on values—that allowed for a more nuanced, interpretive approach to the study of society. By integrating these methods, Weber helped to establish sociology as a discipline that could offer insights into the complexities of human behavior while maintaining scientific rigor.

Weber's engagement with the *Methodenstreit* was a key moment in the development of social science methodology. By developing a methodology that recognized both the need for general principles and the uniqueness of individual social phenomena, Weber provided a framework for the social sciences that acknowledged the complexity of human action and the importance of values in shaping social life. His contributions to the debate between the historical and classical schools helped to establish sociology as a discipline that could both respect the subjectivity of social action and maintain a rigorous, systematic approach to the study of society (Morrison, 2006).

15.8 Max Weber's concept of the *Ideal Type*

Max Weber's concept of the *Ideal Type* is one of his most influential contributions to social science methodology. Developed primarily in his essay *Objectivity in Social*

Science and Social Policy, the *Ideal Type* serves as a conceptual tool that allows social scientists to analyze and understand social phenomena by emphasizing their essential features, abstracted from the complexities of empirical reality. The *Ideal Type* is not meant to represent a real-world model or a perfect instance of a social phenomenon, but rather an idealized, simplified version that helps clarify the essential characteristics of social phenomena for analytical purposes.

Weber defines the *Ideal Type* as a “conceptual pattern” that brings together a specific set of relationships or events from historical life into a coherent whole. This conceptual construct is designed to capture the most essential and defining aspects of a phenomenon, thereby providing a way to understand and compare social structures and behaviors. The *Ideal Type* is a tool for comparative analysis, allowing sociologists to identify common characteristics across different instances of social phenomena and better understand the underlying dynamics that shape them.

One key feature of the *Ideal Type* is that it is not meant to be an empirical description of a real-world entity but rather a model that helps clarify theoretical and conceptual points. It is abstract and simplified, focusing on the essential traits of a social phenomenon, while deliberately disregarding the complex and often contradictory details that might exist in real-world cases. For example, when analyzing the phenomenon of bureaucracy, Weber’s *Ideal Type* of bureaucracy emphasizes the core features of modern bureaucratic organizations—such as hierarchical authority, rational-legal rules, and impersonal relationships—while omitting the specific variations that may exist in different bureaucratic institutions. The *Ideal Type* thus serves as a guide to understanding the fundamental characteristics of a social institution or practice, rather than as a perfect representation of it.

Weber’s *Ideal Type* is also constructed through what he calls “analytical accentuation.” This process involves the highlighting or exaggeration of certain characteristics of a phenomenon in order to make them more visible and analyzable. The *Ideal Type* is designed to emphasize the key features of a phenomenon, allowing sociologists to compare and contrast different instances of the phenomenon in a more systematic way. For instance, Weber’s *Ideal Type* of capitalism emphasizes the rational organization of economic activity, the role of private property, and the pursuit of profit, even though real-world capitalist economies may vary in important ways from this idealized model.

An important aspect of the *Ideal Type* is that it does not claim to describe reality as it is but provides a theoretical construct that can be used to assess and interpret real-

world phenomena. Weber's *Ideal Types* are tools for understanding social reality through abstraction and simplification. This allows for more meaningful comparisons between different social systems and helps scholars identify the factors that influence social change. For example, Weber's *Ideal Type* of the "Protestant ethic" is used to compare the religious values and behaviors associated with Protestantism with those of other religious traditions. While the *Ideal Type* does not capture every detail of Protestantism, it helps highlight the key values—such as the emphasis on hard work, thrift, and rationalization—that Weber believed contributed to the rise of modern capitalism in Europe.

Weber distinguished between different types of *Ideal Types*. Some are historical, representing the development of particular social systems or historical events, while others are more general, intended to capture the essential features of a broader social phenomenon. Weber's *Ideal Types* are not static; they are constantly subject to revision and refinement as new data and insights emerge. The *Ideal Type* thus serves as a flexible tool for theoretical analysis, helping sociologists navigate the complexities of social life while maintaining a focus on the most critical elements of social phenomena.

An important function of the *Ideal Type* is its use in the comparative study of different societies and social phenomena. By comparing the *Ideal Types* of different social systems, Weber was able to analyze how different historical and cultural contexts influenced social action. For instance, Weber's analysis of the development of Western capitalism was based in part on the comparison between the *Ideal Type* of the Protestant work ethic and the more traditional religious values of Catholicism. This allowed Weber to highlight how particular cultural and religious values contributed to the rise of capitalism in Europe, while also identifying key differences between Western and non-Western societies.

Weber's *Ideal Type* is also essential for his broader theoretical framework, particularly his theory of social action. According to Weber, social action is the key to understanding society, and the *Ideal Type* helps to clarify the different ways in which people engage in social action. Weber argued that social action is always motivated by a combination of values, goals, and beliefs, which are embedded in social structures and institutions. The *Ideal Type* provides a way to understand and compare these various forms of social action, allowing sociologists to uncover the underlying dynamics that shape human behavior in different contexts.

Furthermore, Weber's use of the *Ideal Type* is integral to his broader approach to sociology, which emphasizes the interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*) of social

phenomena. Weber believed that social scientists must not only observe social action but also interpret the meanings and intentions behind it. The *Ideal Type* plays a crucial role in this interpretive process, providing a framework for understanding how social actors understand and make sense of their own behavior, as well as the behavior of others. This interpretive approach contrasts with the positivist methods of the classical school, which sought to explain social behavior through universal laws and causal relationships. Instead, Weber's *Ideal Type* focuses on understanding the subjective meanings behind social actions, making it an essential tool for the study of society.

One of the main criticisms of Weber's *Ideal Type* is that it can oversimplify social phenomena and may not always capture the complexity of real-world situations. Critics argue that the abstraction involved in constructing *Ideal Types* might result in the exclusion of important details that could alter our understanding of a given social phenomenon. While Weber acknowledged the limitations of *Ideal Types*, he maintained that they were necessary for making sense of the complexities of social life and for providing a theoretical framework that could guide empirical research.

Weber's concept of the *Ideal Type* is a foundational methodological tool in sociology, offering a way to analyze and understand social phenomena through abstraction, simplification, and comparison. By emphasizing the essential features of a phenomenon, the *Ideal Type* helps scholars identify key elements of social life while acknowledging the limitations and complexities of real-world cases. The *Ideal Type* is an essential part of Weber's interpretive sociology, providing a theoretical framework that enables sociologists to understand the meanings and intentions behind social actions and to make comparisons across different social systems and historical contexts. Despite its criticisms, the *Ideal Type* remains a valuable tool for analyzing the dynamics of social life and understanding the processes that shape human behavior (Morrison, 2006).

15.9 Conclusion

Max Weber's contributions to the methodological foundation of social science have had a lasting impact on the discipline. His development of *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types* provided sociologists with tools to interpret and analyze social phenomena in a more nuanced and contextualized way, emphasizing the subjective meanings behind human actions. Weber's engagement with the *Methodenstreit* helped shape the debate on whether the social sciences should mimic the natural sciences or adopt distinct methods

that account for the complexity and variability of human behavior. Through his emphasis on the distinction between facts and values, Weber reinforced the idea that the social sciences require a unique approach that considers both the objective and subjective dimensions of social life. His methodology continues to be central to the study of sociology, offering both a theoretical framework for understanding social action and a practical tool for analyzing diverse social structures and behaviors.

15.10 Summary

This chapter explored Max Weber's pivotal contributions to the methodology of social sciences, focusing on his concepts of *Verstehen* (interpretive understanding) and *Ideal Types*. Weber's approach emphasized the need to understand human actions through the subjective meanings individuals attach to them, which contrasted with the objective methods used in the natural sciences. The chapter also discussed the *Methodenstreit* (Methodological Dispute), where Weber played a key role in reconciling the historical and classical schools of thought, advocating for a methodological approach that recognizes the unique nature of social phenomena. Additionally, Weber's work examined the distinction between the natural and social sciences, highlighting the importance of values in social science research. His *Ideal Types* served as conceptual tools for analyzing and comparing social phenomena, while *Verstehen* allowed for a deeper understanding of the intentions and meanings behind human actions. Weber's methodology continues to shape the study of sociology and remains a central framework for interpreting social life and human behavior.

15.11 Questions

Short Questions

1. What is Weber's concept of *Verstehen* and its significance in social science methodology?
2. Define *Ideal Types* and explain their role in Weber's approach to sociology.
3. What was the *Methodenstreit* and how did Weber contribute to resolving it?
4. How does Weber differentiate between the methods of the natural and social sciences?
5. What is the role of values in Weber's methodology?

Broad Questions

1. Discuss the impact of Weber's *Verstehen* and *Ideal Types* on the study of social phenomena and human behavior.
2. Analyze Weber's position in the *Methodenstreit*, highlighting his contributions to the development of social science methodology.
3. Evaluate Weber's critique of positivism in relation to the distinction between facts and values in social sciences.
4. How do Weber's methods allow for a more nuanced understanding of social action compared to the approaches of the classical school?
5. Assess the strengths and limitations of Weber's methodological approach in comparison to other sociological theories.

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Unit 16 Understanding Social Action

Structure

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16.1 Learning Objectives

In the current Unit we are going to be introduced to the one of the influential figures of Sociology, Max Weber. The objectives of the chapter remain primarily to understand the Max Weber primarily as a Sociologist, his contributions to the field of sociology, the methodology that he developed in contrast to the other sociologists of his time, and finally the different concepts that has been developed by him in order to understand society. In the present Unit, we are currently going to be discussing the idea of Social Action which remains the fundamental category to expand on a number of other theories of Weber. Social Action remains fundamental as the building block to his other Sociological Theories. The learning objectives of the present unit are as follows.

- To understand the sociological tenets of Max Weber
- To understand Social Action as a primary building block to his understanding.
- To understand the constitution of Social Action
- To understand the types of Social Action

16.2 Introduction

Sociological theories remain as the fundamental cornerstone to sociological understanding, aiding to the larger sociological imagination. Max Weber (1864-1920) is widely recognized as the founding fathers of sociology, best known for his efforts to define the uniqueness of the modern West and to provide causal explanations for its specific historical development.

Weber's approach to understanding society was unique in itself, the singular emphasis on categories such as economic, political, or religious forces but a multidimensional idea, that evaluated the causal weight of both ideas and interests. Max Weber is a name to conjure with in modern social thought. His work is used as a source of authoritative knowledge as insight, and he seems to shine through his criticism.

16.3 Max Weber: Life and Works

Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Germany into a distinguished and cosmopolitan family of entrepreneurs, scholars, politicians. Most of his younger days were spent in Berlin, from the early years he was recognized as an excellent and exceptional student, his curiosity being embedded in the subjects of philosophy literature, and history. He studies economic history, law and philosophy at the universities of Gottingen. In 1893 he was appointed to a chair in commercial law at Humboldt University in Berlin at a young age, and in 1894 he was accepted as a chair in economics and finance in Freiburg. A trip to the United States in 1904 played an important part in learning about America's dynamism, energy and uniqueness, as well as for the self-reliance and distrust of authority widespread there. This was highly instrumental in his most famous work 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'.

Max Weber's work stands directly antagonistic to the ideas of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sociology, as described by Max Weber, offered a new position for human species to be crystallized, opposed to the idea that history possessed an independent meaning, people now exist as unequivocal makers of their twentieth century, Weber insisted that meaning could arise only out of their struggles to mold meaningful lives and the choices they made on this behalf.

Although the secular and industrial character of turn-of-the-century Germany directly influenced the central tenets of Weber's sociology, his work was dedicated towards a lot more than that. A radically comparative and historical reach characterized his

research, his research was able to dive into the diverse orientations of the supernatural realm. The monumental shift to a radically empirical sociology rooted in subjective meaning remains the foundation to Weber's sociology. This understanding would further itself and explain the different categories put forth by Weber.

16.4 Social Action: The Concept

From the outset Weber was obsessed with the possibility, even the necessity, of analyzing human actions and relationships scientifically. He recognized more than many of his contemporaries that a scientific approach to human behavior must enter into the subject matter of an authentic analysis. The ideas of "Social Action" remains intrinsic to Weberian thought and theory, the subjective meaning that one attributes to it. This subjectively meaningful action is basic for the social scientist's understanding compared to merely reactive or imitative behavior. Social Action, he insists involve both a "meaningful orientation of behavior to the others" and the individual's interpretive, or reflective, aspects. People are definitely social beings but they are merely not social, they also have the ability to actively interpret situations, interactions, and relationships with reference to values, beliefs, interests, emotions, power, authority, law, customs, conventions, habits, ideas to name a few. It is this interpretive power that distinguishes their actions compared to others.

The central idea of meaningful action is what separates Weber's sociological understanding fundamentally from all the behaviorist, structuralist and positivists schools. Sociologists can understand the meaningfulness of others action, either through 'rational understanding', which involves an intellectual grasp of the meaning actors attribute to their actions, or through 'intuitive' or 'empathetic' understanding, which refers to the comprehension of the "emotional context in which the action (take) place". Social action can include both failure to act and passive agreement may be oriented to the past, present or expected future behavior of others. It might be motivated by revenge for a past attack, defense against present, or measures of defense against future aggression. The "others" may be individual persons and may be known to the actor as such, or may constitute an indefinite plurality and may be entirely known as individuals. Thus, money is a means of exchange which the actor accepts in payment because he orients his action to the expectation that a large but unknown number of individuals he is personally unacquainted with will be ready to accept it in exchange on some future occasions.

Weber's concept of social action offers a nuanced framework that emphasizes the dynamic and interpretive dimensions of human behaviour within a social context. Unlike positivist approaches that seek to generalize social behaviour through quantifiable data, Weber firmly believed that social actions are inherently subjective and meaningful. These actions are not mechanical responses to stimuli but are deeply rooted in the intentions, emotions, beliefs, and interpretations of individuals who constantly navigate a complex social environment. This focus on subjective meaning as a fundamental component of social interaction is what sets Weber apart from other theorists such as Emile Durkheim, whose structuralist approach largely ignored the interpretive aspects of human behaviour. For Weber, it was imperative for sociologists to go beyond surface-level observations and delve into the subjective realm where meanings are created and contested.

A key aspect of Weber's framework is the distinction between mere behavior and social action. While behavior can be reactive, instinctive, or imitative, social action requires a deliberate and meaningful orientation toward others. In Weber's view, social action becomes sociologically significant only when it carries intentional meaning that is directed toward other individuals or groups. This intention could manifest in various ways—through symbolic gestures, language, customs, or even subtle body movements. Weber's approach underscores that social life is not merely composed of structured systems but is also a vibrant and interpretative process where individuals continuously engage in meaning-making. For example, the act of shaking hands may seem trivial at first glance, but its meaning becomes clear when one understands its social context as a gesture of respect, greeting, or agreement. The intentionality behind the gesture is what transforms it from a mere physical act into a meaningful social interaction.

Weber's insistence on understanding the subjective dimension of social actions calls for a sophisticated methodological approach, which he termed *Verstehen*, or interpretive understanding. This method entails both rational and empathetic comprehension of social phenomena. Rational understanding involves intellectually grasping the meanings actors attribute to their actions, such as understanding the strategic decisions made by business executives or the formal protocols followed in a bureaucratic organization. On the other hand, empathetic understanding requires immersing oneself in the emotional and experiential contexts that shape social actions. For instance, to comprehend the social rituals surrounding grief in different cultures, a sociologist must not only analyze the structural aspects of these rituals but also engage empathetically with the emotional experiences of the individuals involved. This dual

approach allows sociologists to capture the richness and complexity of social life, which often eludes purely quantitative methods.

Moreover, Weber's concept of social action emphasizes that human beings are not passive recipients of social norms and structures. They actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist these influences based on their subjective understanding. This interpretive capacity allows individuals to respond creatively to social situations, challenge existing power dynamics, and contribute to social change. For example, a student protest against educational policies may initially seem like a spontaneous act of dissent, but upon closer examination, it reveals a complex interplay of individual motivations, shared grievances, and strategic planning. The protesters' actions are shaped not only by their immediate circumstances but also by their interpretive engagement with broader political, economic, and cultural contexts. Weber's emphasis on this interpretive dimension highlights the agency of social actors and the importance of understanding the subjective meanings that underpin their actions.

Social action, in Weber's view, is also characterized by its temporal orientation. It may be directed toward past events, present circumstances, or future expectations. This temporal dimension further complicates the analysis of social action, as individuals often navigate multiple timelines simultaneously. For instance, a community's decision to preserve traditional practices may be motivated by a desire to honour past ancestors, address present challenges, and ensure future cultural continuity. Similarly, economic transactions are often shaped by expectations about future market conditions and the anticipated behavior of other market participants. Weber's analysis captures this temporal complexity by acknowledging that social actions are not static but are constantly evolving in response to changing circumstances and interpretations.

Finally, Weber's conception of social action underscores the role of shared cultural and symbolic frameworks in shaping human behavior. While individual interpretations are crucial, they are often guided by broader social norms, values, and belief systems. These cultural frameworks provide individuals with a repertoire of meanings that they draw upon to make sense of their social world. However, Weber was acutely aware that these frameworks are not monolithic or unchanging; they are constantly being renegotiated and contested. This dynamic interplay between individual agency and cultural structures is central to Weber's sociological thought and has profound implications for understanding social life.

In conclusion, Weber's theory of social action offers a comprehensive and interpretive approach to understanding human behavior in a social context. By emphasizing the

subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their actions and the interpretive processes that underlie social interactions, Weber provides a powerful framework that challenges deterministic models of social analysis. His insistence on the importance of Verstehen and his recognition of the temporal, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of social action underscore the complexity and richness of social life. Through this lens, sociologists are better equipped to capture the nuances of human behavior and to appreciate the dynamic and interpretive nature of social interactions.

16.5 Verstehen

The notion of verstehen is based on what Weber perceived as an advantage of the social sciences over the natural sciences. In natural sciences one can observe uniformities and deduce generalization about the relationship of elements. In the social sciences, on the other hand, we can understand the actions and comprehend the subjective intentions of the actors and this comprehension is immediate. We can understand, why a politician makes promises and why the mother rocks her baby. Verstehen makes possible the scientific study of social behavior in two ways, it facilitates direct observational understanding of the subjective meaning of human actions and its facilitates understanding of the underlying motive.

It was necessary for Weber, to re work his methodological skills to comprehend large and complex social phenomena, for he was attempting to outline and analyze the entire metrics contributing to the rise of modern industrial civilization. Behind economics, law, politics and religion, Weber sought to analyze the interconnections of all social behavior and that no rational human act was left out. In such a pursuit, he produced nothing short of an outright sociology of world history. Verstehen sociology was not a search for the underlying principles of existence, but a conscious search for the insights and solutions to the unique and changing problems that human beings face.

16.6 Constitution of Social Action

Not every kind of action is “social” in the sense of discussion, overt action is nonsocial if it is oriented solely to the behavior of the inanimate objects. Subjective attitudes constitute social action only so far as they are oriented towards the behavior of the others. To take an example it would be, religious behavior is not social if it is a matter

of contemplation or of solitary prayer. The economic activity of an individual is social only if it takes into account of the behavior of someone else. Thus, very generally it becomes social insofar as the actor assumes that others will respect his actual control over economic goods. Concretely it is social for instance if in relation to the actor's own consumption the future wants of others are taken into account and this becomes one consideration affecting the actor's own saving. Or, in another connection, production may be oriented to the future wants of other people.

Not every type of contact of human being has a social character, this is rather confined to the cases where the actor's behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of others. Social Action is not identical either with the similar actions of many persons or with every act influenced by other persons. Thus, if at the beginning of a shower a number of people on the street put up their umbrellas at the same time, this would not ordinarily be a case of action mutually oriented to that of each other, but rather of all reacting in the same way to the like need of protection from the rain. It is well known that the actions of the individual are strongly influenced by the mere fact he is a member of a crowd confined within a limited space. Thus, the subject matter of studies of "crowd psychology" such as those of Le Bon will be called "action conditioned by crowds".

It is also possible for large numbers, though dispersed, to be influenced simultaneously or successively by source of influence operating similarly on all the individuals, as by his membership in a "mass" and by the fact that he is aware of being a member. Some types of reaction are only made possible by the mere fact that the individual acts as part of the crowd. Others become more difficult under these conditions. Hence, it is possible that a particular event or mode of human behavior can give rise to the most diverse kind of feeling- gaiety, anger, enthusiasm, despair, and passions of all sorts – in a crowd situation which would not occur at all or not nearly so readily if the individual were alone. But for this to happen there need not, at least in many cases be any meaningful relation between the behavior of the individual and the fact that he is a member of a crowd as such and the action is not oriented to that fact on the level of meaning. At the same time the borderline is naturally highly indefinite. In such cases as that of the influence of the demagogue, there may be a wide variation in the extent to which his mass clientele is there may be a wide variation in the extent to which his mass clientele is affected by a meaningful reaction to the fact of its large numbers; and whatever this relation may be, it is open to varying interpretations.

But furthermore, mere 'imitation' of the action of others, such as that on which Tarde has rightly laid emphasis, will not be considered a case of specifically social action if it is purely reactive so that there is no meaningful orientation to the actor imitated. The borderline is, however, so indefinite that it is often hardly possible to discriminate. The mere fact that a person is found to employ some apparently useful procedure which he learned from someone else, does not, however, constitute, in the present sense, social action. Action such as this is not oriented to the action of the other person, but the actor has, through observing the other become acquainted with certain objective facts; and it is these to which his action is oriented. His action is then casually determined by the others is imitated because it is fashionable or traditional or exemplary or lends social distinction, or on similar grounds, is meaningfully oriented either to the behavior of the source of imitation or of third persons or of both. There are of course all manner of transitional cases, between the two types of imitation. Both the phenomena discussed above, the behavior of crowds and imitation, stand on the indefinite borderline of social action. The same is true, as will often appear, of traditionalism and charisma. The reason for the indefiniteness of the line in these and other cases lies in the fact that both the orientation to the behavior of others and the meaning which can be imputed by the actor himself, are by no means always capable of clear determination and are often altogether unconscious and seldom fully self-conscious. Mere "influence" and meaningful orientation cannot therefore always be clearly differentiated on the empirical level. But conceptually it is essential to distinguish them, even though merely reactive imitation may well have a degree of sociological importance at least equal to that of the type which can be called social action in the strict sense. Sociology, it goes without saying, is by no means confined to the study of social action; this is only at least for the kind of sociology being developed here, its central subject matter that which may be said to be decisive for its status as a science. But this does not imply any judgement on the comparative importance of this and other factors.

Weber emphasizes on the concept of Social Action (*Gemeinschafts Handeln*) meaning that human action is meaningfully related to the behavior of the other people. It can be well illustrated through the example that Social action does not occur when two cyclists, for example, collide unintentionally; however, it does occur when they to avoid the collision or sock one another afterwards or negotiate to settle the matter peacefully. Social Action is not the only type that is necessary for causal explanation, but it does form the basis of interpretive sociology. One important aspect of Social Action is its meaningful orientation to the expectations that others will act in a certain way, and to the presumable chances of success for one's own action resulting there

forth. Actions can have a clear understanding, an objective type of explanation, when there is an objective chance (i.e. more or less probability as expressed in a “judgement of objective possibility”) these explanations are particularly well founded. In particular, Weber would argue that rational action is oriented towards such expectations. In principle, it appears at

16.7 Types of Social Action

Weber has described about the four types of meaningful action, Means- end rational, value rational, affectual, and traditional action. Each of these types refer to the ideal typical motivational orientations of actors.

- a) Weber defines action as **means-end rational** (*zweckrational*) when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed. This involves a rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end of the secondary consequences and finally the relative importance of different possible ends.
- b) In a similar manner people also possess the capacity to act **value- rationally**, even though this kind of action has appeared empirically in its pure form only rarely. It exists when social action is “determined by a conscious belief, in the values for its own sake of some ethical , aesthetic , religious or other forms of behavior , independently of its prospects of success. Value Rational action would necessarily involve ‘commands’ or ‘demands’ which, in the actor’s opinion are binding (*verbindlich*) on him. Notions of honor involve values, as do salvation doctrines. In addition, determined by the actor’s specifics affects and feeling states,” affectual action, which involves an emotional attachment requires to be distinguished, clearly from value- rational and means- ends rational action. Traditional action, determined by ingrained habituation and age-old customs, and often merely a routine reaction to common stimuli, stands on the borderline of subjectively meaningful action.
- c) Strictly **traditional behavior**, like the reactive type of imitation discussed above, lies very close to the borderline of what can justifiably be called meaningfully oriented action, and indeed often on the other side. For it is very often a matter of almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli which guide behavior in a course which has been repeated followed. The great bulk of all everyday action to which people have become habitually accustomed approaches

this type. Hence, its place in a systematic classification is not merely that of a limiting case because, attachment to habitual forms can be held with varying degrees of self-consciousness and in a variety of senses.

- d) Purely **affectual behavior** also stands on the borderline of what can be considered “meaningfully” oriented, and often it too, goes over the line. It may, for instance, consist in an uncontrolled reaction to some exceptional stimulus. It is a case of sublimation when affectually determined action occurs in the form of a conscious release of emotional tension. When this happens it is usually well on the road to rationalization in one or the other or both of the above senses.

The orientation of value-rational action is distinguished from the affectual type by its clearly self conscious formulation of the ultimate values governing the action and consistently planned orientation of its detailed course to these values. At the same time the twotypes have a common element, namely that the meaning of the action does not lie in the achievement of a result ulterior to it., but in carrying out the specific type of action for its own sake. Action is affectual;, if it satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification , devotion ,contemplative bliss , or for working off emotional tensions (irrespective of the level of sublimation)

Examples of pure value rational orientation would be the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves , act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty , honour, the pursuit of beauty , a religious call, personal loyalty , or the importance of some “cause” no matter in what it consists. In our terminology, value -rational action always involves “commands “or “demands” which, in the actor’s opinion, binding on him. It is only in cases where human action is motivated by the fulfillment of such unconditional demands that it will be called value-rational. This is the case in widely varying degrees, but for the most part only to a relatively slight extent. Nevertheless, it will be shown that the occurrence of this mode of action is important enough to justify its formulation as a distinct type; though it may be remarked that there is no intention here of attempting to formulate in any sense an exhaustive classification of types of action.

Action is instrumentally rational when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed. This involves rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends. These together would construct the types of Social Action- established as an analytical base

that assists conceptualization of diffuse action-orientations. Rational action in reference to interests constitutes to Weber, only one possible way of orienting action.

16.7.1 An Elaborated Discussion

Constitution of Social Action

Max Weber's concept of social action emphasizes that human behavior becomes sociologically significant only when it carries subjective meaning and is oriented toward others. Unlike automatic or purely instinctual responses, social action involves deliberate consideration, interpretation, and often anticipation of how others will respond. This distinction is fundamental in Weberian thought, as it enables sociologists to study the meaningful and intentional aspects of human interactions.

Social action is dynamic and interpretative, shaped by the context, culture, and social structures in which individuals operate. For Weber, sociologists must understand not only the observable behavior but also the subjective motivations and meanings that underlie social actions. These subjective elements make human interactions complex and varied, requiring a nuanced analytical approach.

Defining Social Action

Social action, according to Weber, refers to any behavior that carries personal significance for the individual and is oriented toward the behavior of others. Importantly, this orientation can involve direct interactions or indirect references to societal norms and expectations. For instance:

- **Gift Exchange:** Consider the act of giving a gift. If a person gives a birthday present to a friend, the action is meaningful because it is motivated by social norms, expectations of reciprocity, and the desire to maintain a positive relationship. The giver may anticipate the recipient's reaction—gratitude, appreciation, or even disappointment if the gift does not meet expectations. The entire exchange is laden with subjective interpretations and social meanings.
- **Traffic Behavior:** When a driver stops at a red light, the behavior is not just a response to a traffic signal but is oriented toward other drivers and pedestrians who expect compliance with traffic rules. The driver's action maintains social order on the road and is guided by the anticipation that others will also follow the rules.
- **Workplace Cooperation:** In a team meeting, when an employee shares a suggestion, they are not simply communicating information; they are engaging in a social action shaped by the expectation of feedback, recognition, or critique.

from colleagues. The act is meaningful because it contributes to group dynamics and organizational goals.

These examples illustrate that social action involves a meaningful orientation toward others, driven by subjective interpretations and social contexts.

Conditions for Social Action

Weber identifies several essential conditions that define social action:

- **Subjective Meaning:** The individual must assign personal significance to the action, which may be motivated by values, emotions, beliefs, or goals.
 - *Example:* A student protesting against a new academic policy does so because they believe it threatens their future opportunities, even if others are indifferent.
- **Orientation Toward Others:** Social action must involve a reference to the behavior of others, whether directly or indirectly.
 - *Example:* Posting a congratulatory message on social media is oriented toward an audience, even if the interaction remains virtual.
- **Intentionality:** The action must be purposeful rather than reflexive.
 - *Example:* Apologizing after accidentally stepping on someone's foot is a social action because it reflects an intentional effort to repair social harmony.
- **Interpretation and Context:** Social action is shaped by the actor's understanding of the social environment.
 - *Example:* Wearing formal attire to a job interview is a social action guided by the interpretation of professional norms and expectations.

These conditions highlight that social action is not merely about observable behaviors but involves complex interpretations and purposeful engagement with others.

Non-Social Actions and Ambiguities

Not all human behaviors qualify as social action. Weber makes a clear distinction between social and non-social actions:

- **Non-Social Actions:** Behaviours directed at inanimate objects or those without reference to others are non-social actions.
 - *Example:* A person fixing their car alone without considering others' expectations is performing a non-social action.

- **Borderline Cases:** Certain behaviours occupy a grey area between social and non-social actions.
 - *Example:* Imagine two cyclists accidentally colliding on a road. This is not social action. However, if they negotiate to resolve the situation or argue about who was at fault, their behaviour becomes social action as it involves meaningful engagement with each other.
- **Imitative Actions:** Actions that are purely reactive or imitative without meaningful interpretation do not qualify as social action.
 - *Example:* A person copying a dance move seen on television without thinking about its cultural significance is not engaging in social action. However, if they learn the dance to perform it at a cultural event and consider audience expectations, it becomes a social action.

These distinctions underscore the importance of intentionality and social reference in defining social action.

Complexity in Social Action

Social action often involves multiple layers of meaning and motivation, reflecting the complex nature of human interactions. Actions can simultaneously be oriented toward the past, present, and future:

- **Temporal Complexity:** A family's decision to celebrate a traditional festival may be motivated by honoring ancestors (past), fostering community bonds (present), and ensuring the transmission of cultural values to future generations.
- **Economic Transactions:** A shopkeeper's decision to stock a particular product may be influenced by past sales trends, current consumer demand, and future market predictions.
- **Gift-Giving Dynamics:** Returning to the example of gift exchange, consider a wedding gift. The giver's motivation may include repaying a past favour, strengthening a current relationship, and securing future social reciprocity.

These examples highlight that social action is rarely linear or simple; it often involves complex interpretive processes that span time and social contexts.

Implications for Sociology

Understanding the constitution of social action is fundamental to Weber's interpretive sociology. It provides a methodological basis for studying the subjective and contextual dimensions of human behaviour, moving beyond surface-level observations. This approach allows sociologists to capture the diversity and variability of social life, as

it emphasizes the unique meanings individuals and groups attribute to their actions. By focusing on the meaningful orientation of behaviour, Weber's concept of social action bridges the gap between individual agency and social structures. For example:

- **Political Protests:** Understanding a political rally requires examining not only the participants' visible actions (such as chanting slogans) but also their motivations, grievances, and interpretive frameworks.
- **Family Rituals:** A sociological analysis of family rituals must consider the subjective meanings attached to these practices, such as expressions of love, respect, or religious devotion.
- **Corporate Decision-Making:** Understanding why a company adopts a particular strategy involves analyzing the subjective interpretations of market trends, organizational culture, and stakeholder expectations.

This dual focus on individual agency and social context makes Weber's framework both comprehensive and adaptable to a wide range of sociological inquiries.

16.8 Critical Evaluation of Weber's Concept of Social Action

Max Weber's concept of social action has been one of the most influential and enduring contributions to sociological thought. It provided a robust framework for understanding the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions and the role of intentionality in shaping social interactions. However, despite its ground breaking nature, Weber's theory has not been without criticism. Scholars have pointed out limitations concerning its methodological rigor, theoretical scope, and applicability in modern sociological research. A critical evaluation of Weber's social action theory involves examining both its strengths and weaknesses in the context of contemporary sociological discourse.

Strengths of Weber's Concept of Social Action

One of the most significant contributions of Weber's theory is its rejection of reductionist approaches to human behaviour. By emphasizing the importance of subjective meaning and interpretive understanding, Weber challenged the deterministic models promoted by positivist and behaviourist schools of thought. His insistence on the interpretive method (*Verstehen*) encouraged a more nuanced analysis of social phenomena, enabling sociologists to explore the complexities of human interactions that are often overlooked in purely quantitative research.

Moreover, Weber's categorization of social action into four distinct types—instrumentally rational, value-rational, affectual, and traditional—provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing the motivations behind social behaviour. This classification remains relevant in contemporary sociological studies, particularly in understanding diverse social contexts, decision-making processes, and cultural variations.

Weber's methodological innovation, particularly his use of *Verstehen*, allowed sociologists to bridge the gap between objective observation and subjective interpretation. This dual approach has influenced qualitative research methods, such as ethnography and in-depth interviews, where understanding the actor's perspective is essential. Weber's work continues to shape sociological inquiry by highlighting the importance of context, agency, and the symbolic meanings embedded in social interactions.

The temporal flexibility inherent in Weber's concept of social action is another strength. By acknowledging that social actions can be oriented toward past, present, or future events, Weber offered a dynamic and adaptable framework for analyzing social phenomena. This temporal dimension allows for a deeper understanding of how historical legacies, present circumstances, and future aspirations influence social behaviour.

Methodological Limitations

Despite its strengths, Weber's concept of social action has faced criticism for its methodological ambiguities. One of the primary challenges is the subjective nature of *Verstehen*. Critics argue that relying on empathetic understanding makes it difficult to maintain objectivity in sociological research. Unlike the natural sciences, where phenomena can be observed and measured with precision, the subjective interpretations inherent in social action analysis introduce the risk of bias and inconsistency.

Furthermore, Weber's approach does not provide clear guidelines for operationalizing and measuring subjective meanings. This lack of methodological clarity poses challenges for researchers seeking to apply his concepts in empirical studies. The interpretive nature of *Verstehen* also raises questions about the replicability and generalizability of findings, which are key criteria for scientific inquiry.

Weber's emphasis on subjective meaning has also been critiqued for neglecting structural factors that constrain individual agency. While his focus on intentionality and interpretation is valuable, it risks underestimating the influence of social institutions, power dynamics, and economic structures on human behavior. Structuralist and Marxist

scholars, for instance, have argued that Weber's approach downplays the role of class, ideology, and systemic inequalities in shaping social action.

Theoretical Gaps and Criticisms

Another criticism of Weber's theory is its limited engagement with collective action. While Weber's framework is well-suited for analysing individual behaviour, it struggles to account for the complexities of group dynamics and social movements. Scholars have pointed out that collective actions often emerge from structural grievances and shared identities rather than purely individual motivations. As a result, Weber's focus on subjective meaning may not fully capture the emergent and transformative nature of collective social phenomena.

Additionally, feminist sociologists have critiqued Weber's concept of social action for its gender-blind assumptions. His theoretical framework does not adequately address how gender shapes social interactions and the subjective meanings attached to them. Feminist scholars argue that social action must be analysed in the context of gendered power relations and social norms that influence behaviour and interpretation.

Postmodern theorists have also questioned the universality of Weber's categories of social action. In a fragmented and culturally diverse world, the fixed typologies proposed by Weber may not adequately capture the fluid and hybrid forms of social behaviour observed in contemporary societies. Postmodern critiques highlight the need for more flexible and context-specific approaches that can accommodate the complexities of identity, culture, and globalization.

Applicability in Contemporary Sociology

Despite these criticisms, Weber's concept of social action remains highly relevant in contemporary sociological research. The rise of qualitative methodologies, such as narrative analysis and participant observation, reflects an ongoing interest in understanding the subjective dimensions of social life. Weber's emphasis on meaning and interpretation has inspired numerous studies in areas such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology.

In contemporary political sociology, Weber's framework is valuable for analysing political behavior and decision-making processes. For example, studies on voter behaviour often examine the subjective motivations and interpretive frameworks that guide individuals' political choices. Similarly, research on social media interactions draws on Weberian insights to explore how users construct and negotiate meanings in digital spaces.

Weber's concept of social action is also relevant in the study of organizational behaviour. Understanding how employees interpret organizational policies, workplace culture, and managerial decisions provides valuable insights into organizational dynamics and employee engagement. Weber's emphasis on subjective meaning encourages researchers to go beyond surface-level analyses and explore the deeper motivations that drive organizational behaviour.

Moreover, Weber's recognition of the temporal dimension of social action is particularly relevant in understanding the long-term effects of social policies, cultural practices, and historical events. This temporal flexibility allows sociologists to analyse how past experiences shape present actions and future aspirations, providing a more holistic understanding of social phenomena.

16.9 Conclusion

Each type of these meaningful action can be found in all epochs and civilizations. The social action of even primitive people may be means-end rational and value-rational and to assume that modern man is endowed with greater inherent capacity for either type of action in comparison to his ancestors would indeed be wrong. As a result of identifiable social forces, some epochs may tend to call forth a particular type of action. Weber is convinced that, by utilizing the types of social action typology, sociologists can understand and consequently explain the ways in which the social action of persons living in radically different cultures is subjectively meaningful. Assuming that, as a result of intensive study, researchers have succeeded in becoming thoroughly familiar with particular social context and thus capable of imagining themselves "into" it, an assessment can be made of the extent to which actions approximate one of the types of social action. The subjective meaningfulness of the motives of these actions- whether means-end rational, value-rational, traditional or affectual – then become understandable. Weber's "interpretive sociology" in this manner seeks to help sociologists to comprehend social action on terms of the actor's own intentions.

The foundational emphasis is upon a pluralism of motives, which distinguishes Weber's sociology unequivocally from all schools of behaviorism. All approaches that place social structures at the forefront, for example, those rooted in Durkheim's 'Social Facts' or Marx's classes. These are all the positivist approaches that endow norms and they seem to be tightly bonded to social structure. Here the heterogeneity of

motives must be recognized. A great array of motives within a single “external form” is, Weber argues, both analytically and empirically possible and sociologically significant. The subjective meaningfulness of action varies even within the form organizational structure of the political or religious sect. Yet just this reasoning leads Weber to a conundrum: for what subjective reasons do persons orient their social action in common, such that demarcated groupings are formulated? This question assumes, a great urgency, for he is convinced that the absence of such orientations- towards, for example, the state, bureaucratic organizations, traditions, and values – means that “structures” cease to exist. The state, for example, in the end is nothing more than the patterned action- orientations of its politicians, judges, police, civil servants etc.

16.10 Summary

Far from the formal methodological postulates only, these fundamental distinctions directly anchor Weber’s empirical studies, as will become apparent. The investigation of the subjective meaning of action stood at the very center, for example, of his famous “Protestant ethic Thesis”. Yet Weber engaged in a massive empirical effort to understand the subjective meaning of “the other” on its own terms throughout his comparative historical sociology. Weber largely attempted to understand the diverse ways in which persons subjectively “make sense” of their activities. He argued that sociologists should attempt to do so even when the subjective meaning- complexes they discover seem strange or odd to them. Always, however “Social Action” is for us individual’s behavior, either historically observable or theoretically possible likely in relation to the actual or anticipated potential behavior of the other individuals. Social Action is *Gesellschaftshandeln* (rationally regulated action) insofar as it is (1) meaningfully oriented towards rules which have been (2) established rationally with a view towards the expected behavior of the “associates” and insofar as (3) the meaningful orientation is indeed instrumentally rational on the part of the actor. Very Tentatively, established rules (in purely empirical sense envisaged here) maybe defined as follows they are either (a) one-sided demands of some persons towards others; in the rational limiting case, they are explicit orders or (b) a mutual declaration to the effect that a certain kind of action will be undertaken or is to be expected; in the limiting case, this involves an explicit agreement.

For Weber, the ability to grasp the subjective quality of human behavior is dependent upon the scientist’s ability to interpret the causal meaning of human action. He emphasizes on the fact that a correct causal interpretation of a concrete course of

action is arrived at when the overt action and the motives have both been correctly apprehended and at the same time their meaning has been understood. Weber also defined the term social relationship in order to describe the patterned human interaction which is intentional, meaningful and symbolic. Weber conceives of sociology as a comprehensive science of Social Action, the struggle to arrive at and maintain a scientifically justifiable stance vis-à-vis behavior is necessarily not static.

16.11 Questions

Short Questions

1. What is social action according to Max Weber?
2. How does Weber differentiate social action from mere behavior?
3. What are the four types of social action identified by Weber?
4. What is the significance of *Verstehen* in Weber's methodology?
5. How does Weber's approach to sociology differ from positivism?
6. Give one example of traditional social action.
7. Why is subjective meaning important in Weber's concept of social action?
8. What does Weber mean by rational understanding in social action?
9. How does social action relate to past, present, and future contexts?
10. What is the role of emotions in Weber's theory of social action?

Long Questions

1. Explain Weber's concept of social action and discuss its defining characteristics.
2. Critically evaluate the role of subjective meaning in Weber's analysis of social action.
3. Describe the four types of social action according to Weber, with appropriate examples.
4. Discuss the methodological importance of *Verstehen* in Weber's sociological approach. How does it differ from positivist methodologies?
5. How does Weber's concept of social action address the complexities of human interactions in a social context?
6. Analyze the limitations of Weber's theory of social action and discuss how it has been critiqued by feminist and structuralist scholars.

7. How does the temporal dimension influence social action according to Weber? Provide examples to support your answer.
8. Compare and contrast Weber's theory of social action with Emile Durkheim's structuralist approach.
9. Discuss the contemporary relevance of Weber's social action theory in understanding digital interactions and political behavior.
10. Evaluate the practical applications of Weber's social action theory in qualitative sociological research.

16.12 References

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16.13 Glossary

1. **Social Action:** Any action that carries subjective meaning for an individual and is oriented toward the actions of others. It is central to Weber's sociology.
2. **Verstehen:** A German term meaning "interpretive understanding." It refers to the methodological approach in sociology where researchers seek to understand the subjective meanings and intentions behind social actions.
3. **Subjective Meaning:** The personal significance that individuals attach to their actions based on values, emotions, or beliefs.
4. **Instrumentally Rational Action:** A type of social action where individuals act to achieve specific goals by selecting the most efficient means.
5. **Value-Rational Action:** Social action driven by a commitment to a particular value or belief, regardless of the consequences.
6. **Affectual Action:** Social action motivated by emotions and feelings rather than rational deliberation.

7. **Traditional Action:** Social action guided by long-standing customs, habits, or traditions.
8. **Empathetic Understanding:** The process of comprehending the emotional and subjective contexts within which social actions occur.
9. **Rational Understanding:** Intellectual comprehension of the motivations behind an actor's social behavior.
10. **Temporal Dimension:** The orientation of social action toward past, present, or future events.
11. **Interpretive Sociology:** A sociological approach that focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to social phenomena.
12. **Positivism:** A scientific approach that emphasizes empirical observation and rejects subjective interpretation in the study of social phenomena.
13. **Determinism:** The belief that human behavior is shaped by external factors, often in predictable patterns, without significant individual agency.
14. **Agency:** The capacity of individuals to interpret, negotiate, and shape their social environments through intentional action.
15. **Structuralism:** A theoretical approach that emphasizes the role of social structures over individual agency in shaping behavior and social phenomena.
16. **Empirical Inquiry:** A research approach based on observation, evidence, and experimentation to study social phenomena.
17. **Interpretation:** The process through which individuals assign meaning to social situations and interactions.
18. **Methodological Ambiguities:** Unclear or inconsistent research methods that can affect the validity and replicability of findings.
19. **Collective Action:** Coordinated efforts by groups of individuals to achieve common goals, often emerging from shared grievances or interests.
20. **Symbolic Interactionism:** A sociological framework that focuses on the meanings and symbols individuals use to interpret social interactions.

Unit 17 □ Power: Stratification, Authority and Bureaucracy

Structure

- 17.1 Learning Objectives**
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 - 17.3.1 Determination of Class-Situation by Market-Situation**
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 - 17.5.2 ‘Ethnic’ Segregation and ‘Caste’**
- 17.6 Power and Authority**
- 17.7 Types of Social Action and Types of Authority**
- 17.8 Bureaucracy**
- 17.9 The Dynamic Interplay between Social Action and Authority**
- 17.10 Comparison with Marx’s Class Analysis and Power Dynamics**
- 17.11 Conclusion**
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17.1 Learning Objectives

The unit aims to help our learners do the following:

- Understand the relationship between power, stratification, authority, and bureaucracy in shaping social structures.
- Analyze economic determinants of power, class struggles, and status-based hierarchies in maintaining social order.

- Explore Weberian perspectives on authority, social action, and bureaucracy while comparing them with Marx's class analysis and power dynamics.

17.2 Introduction

Weber's concept of social stratification encompasses the interplay of class, status, and party as distinct yet interconnected dimensions shaping individual and group positions in society. According to Weber, economic power, as seen through class divisions, is fundamental but is not the sole determinant of social standing; instead, it interacts with status and party affiliations, creating a complex system where people's access to resources, social respect, and political influence shape their life chances. Classes are formed based on shared economic situations, specifically market positions, which determine individuals' opportunities in accessing resources. For example, those who own assets or can generate income occupy a different social space than those without property, leading to structural divisions grounded in economic opportunities.

However, Weber introduces the concept of status as a separate, socially driven dimension where social honor or prestige defines group distinctions beyond wealth. Status groups tend to have shared lifestyles and values that set them apart, often reinforcing boundaries through exclusive practices such as marriage within the group or social conventions that keep outsiders at bay. At the extreme, these boundaries lead to caste-like structures, where hereditary ties and social rituals form rigid divides, as observed in ethnically segregated communities.

Weber's third dimension of stratification, party, introduces political affiliations and organized efforts to gain influence over communal decisions, operating within the framework of power and authority. Parties represent groups organized to achieve specific goals, sometimes aligning with class or status interests, but they are fundamentally about exercising influence within social structures, whether through political institutions, social clubs, or other organized groups. By merging economic, social, and political layers, Weber's view of social stratification goes beyond simplistic economic determinism, presenting a nuanced picture where individuals' positions in society are shaped by the interdependent forces of class, status, and party, each contributing to a broader stratified order.

Power is a fundamental aspect of all human relationships, shaping interactions at every level of society, from personal relationships to global political systems. The study of power and its manifestations has occupied a central place in sociological

thought, and among the most influential contributions is Max Weber's analysis of power, authority, and bureaucracy. Weber's approach to understanding power goes beyond material dominance, incorporating social, cultural, and organizational dimensions. His nuanced analysis highlights how power is not merely coercive but can be legitimized and institutionalized through various forms of authority.

Weber's analysis of power is distinctive because it connects economic structures with social stratification and political organization. He conceptualized power as the ability to realize one's will, even in the face of resistance. However, power in Weber's framework is not limited to brute force; it is often exercised through legitimate forms, which he categorizes as traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal authority. These types of authority shape the functioning of institutions, social interactions, and bureaucracies, making them central to understanding how power operates in modern society.

This unit explores Weber's comprehensive framework, examining the key elements of power, stratification, authority, and bureaucracy. It delves into Weber's understanding of class, status, and party as interrelated but distinct dimensions of social stratification. Additionally, the chapter investigates the characteristics and significance of bureaucracy, a form of organizational power that Weber saw as both efficient and dehumanizing. By integrating theoretical insights with real-world examples, the chapter provides a thorough understanding of Weber's perspectives on power and its relevance to contemporary sociological analysis.

By the end of this chapter, learners will have a deeper appreciation of Weber's sociological contributions and the enduring relevance of his ideas in understanding the complexities of power, authority, and organizational life.

17.3 Economically Determined Power and the Social Order

In any society, power has an economic basis, but it is also shaped and maintained by social and legal structures. Power itself exists when a recognized set of rules or "orders" is enforced by a group of people committed to making others comply, either by persuasion or force. This legal structure supports the development and distribution of power—whether economic or otherwise—within a community. This is true across all types of legal structures, including those beyond government, and reflects a broader understanding of power as the ability of individuals or groups to enact their will in a social setting, even when others oppose it.

Economic power, however, is not the only type of power. It can result from other forms of influence, as people do not only seek power for wealth but often value it on its own. Sometimes, power is pursued not for wealth but because it carries social recognition or honor. In fact, some forms of power, such as that derived purely from economic wealth, may not lead to social honor. For instance, a wealthy American “Boss” or big investor might willingly ignore or even reject social respect. Economic wealth alone rarely forms the foundation of social respect; rather, honor often comes from power established for reasons beyond wealth. Yet, economic power and honor are sometimes interdependent, where honor can bolster political or economic power. While a legal order can provide a foundation for both honor and power, neither can typically rely on it completely for stability. Legal structures often work to increase the chances of individuals maintaining power or honor, but they rarely create or sustain them independently.

17.3.1 Determination of Class-Situation by Market-Situation

In Weber’s terminology, classes are not communities in the typical sense; they are instead foundational to potential collective action. We can identify a class when a group of people share a specific set of factors affecting their life prospects. This includes economic interests primarily based on owning assets and generating income, and it occurs specifically within the conditions of labor and commodity markets. Class, or “class situation,” is defined by the typical chances of having access to goods and various life conditions shaped by one’s ability to control resources or to exchange skills for an income in a specific economic framework. Thus, class refers to any group of people sharing the same market position.

One of the most fundamental economic realities is that the way resources are divided among people in a competitive market environment creates particular life opportunities. According to the principle of marginal utility, how resources are distributed keeps non-owners from competing for highly valued items, benefiting owners who hold a monopoly over access to such resources. Typically, those who possess resources have more leverage in pricing conflicts with those who have only their labor or self-produced goods to sell and must sell these assets merely to survive.

This distribution structure grants those with resources a monopoly on converting assets from personal holdings into capital goods, which allows them to take on entrepreneurial roles and benefit from capital gains—assuming market conditions apply. Therefore, the fundamental categories of class are “property” and “lack of property.” These categories are effective regardless of whether they apply in price wars or other competitive conflicts.

Within these main categories, class situations become further diversified. For example, property owners can differ significantly based on the type of property they hold, while those without property vary according to the skills they can sell. These differences include those who own houses, factories, storage facilities, or agricultural lands and those who possess transferable assets like money, products of labor, or monopolies of different types. The way property is used, especially when it has a monetary value, also defines the class distinctions among property owners. Similarly, people who do not own property but sell their labor are distinguished based on the types of skills they offer and whether they work in a stable or temporary arrangement.

Essentially, class situations hinge on one's market position, or "market situation." Simple ownership, as seen among cattle herders, where a person's status depends on their cattle ownership, represents an early form of class formation. The transition of possession-based power into class power is also visible in early societies, where debt relationships shaped class situations, as seen in cities with primitive credit markets dominated by wealthy lenders. This setup, in turn, led to early forms of "class struggles."

People whose life circumstances are not controlled by their ability to use goods or services in a marketplace, like slaves, are not part of a "class" in the technical sense but rather a "status group."

17.3.2 Communal Action Flowing from Class Interest

The formation of classes is defined by economic interests, specifically those relevant to the market. However, the term "class interest" can be misleading, as it often implies more than the actual tendencies of individuals in similar economic situations. For example, a factory worker's personal goals can vary greatly depending on their abilities and personal aspirations, even within the same economic context.

Similarly, class interests can lead to organized action, like unions, but these associations are not guaranteed outcomes. When people in the same class situation feel a sense of unity or shared experience, they may act together. This communal action differs from "mass action," which is less organized and arises from individuals reacting to similar conditions without forming a true association.

The extent of organized action among a class is influenced by cultural and intellectual factors, as well as by how clearly the economic conditions are connected to their class situation. When people can see that their struggles stem from a specific economic system rather than natural circumstances, they are more likely to unite and advocate for change. Throughout history, specific class situations have led to organized resistance, such as the urban workers in ancient times who

opposed monopolized trades, or in rural economies that faced exploitative agricultural practices. The modern working class, or “proletariat,” also exemplifies a class that recognizes its shared conditions.

17.4 Types of ‘Class Struggle’

Each class can potentially engage in one of many forms of “class action,” but this does not imply that it automatically does so. A class does not inherently constitute a community. Class-based collective action typically arises in response to specific situations, especially those directly impacting economic interests, such as wages or working conditions.

In ancient times, class struggles often emerged from peasants or artisans trying to resist indebtedness to urban creditors. Debt was a common source of social struggle in cities and among cattle-herding societies. Over time, issues around wages and labor conditions became more prominent as class struggles evolved. In the past, class conflicts often centered on essentials like food availability, and while wage conflicts were rare, they increased over the centuries.

17.5 Status Honor

Unlike classes, status groups tend to function as communities. Status, or social honor, relates to any characteristic shared by a group that receives either positive or negative social valuation. Sometimes, status aligns with class, but they are not identical. For instance, property does not automatically grant status, though over time, wealth frequently leads to social respect.

In communities with subsistence economies, the wealthiest person often becomes the community leader. However, this does not mean that the wealthiest individual has guaranteed social honor or respect. In modern societies, individuals from the same tax class may socialize together, as seen in some Swiss cities, even without formal status distinctions.

Both property owners and non-owners can belong to the same status group. For instance, American gentlemen consider themselves socially equal regardless of wealth, which prevents a social hierarchy based solely on wealth. This kind of social equality stands in contrast to the formal respect for hierarchy seen in societies like Germany.

17.5.1 Guarantees of Status Stratification

Status honor usually implies a particular lifestyle that distinguishes members of a status group. Membership can often involve restrictions on social interactions, such as marriage within the group. For example, in the United States, certain neighborhoods or clubs are limited to people who fit a specific social profile.

As these restrictions solidify, status groups become more insular. Stratification by status leads to a stable social structure based on shared conventions. This type of exclusivity creates a self-sustaining cycle that keeps the group distinct and restricts entry by outsiders.

17.5.2 ‘Ethnic’ Segregation and ‘Caste’

At the most extreme, status groups may become closed castes, where social interactions between groups are almost entirely restricted. This situation creates a strict hierarchy that defines each group’s role within society. Ethnic communities often develop caste-like characteristics, where blood relationships and shared heritage reinforce separation from other groups.

In such cases, the status structure places certain groups above others, transforming them into a vertical hierarchy. Ethnic and status distinctions reinforce each other when ethnic communities develop within a larger political structure. This phenomenon is observed among pariah communities worldwide, where they maintain unique cultural practices and beliefs while being legally marginalized. Jews throughout history serve as an example, often experiencing both ethnic and status-based exclusion. This discussion remains incomplete without fully exploring Weber’s dichotomy between power and authority.

Therefore, this unit explores some of Weber’s crucial insights into power and authority. It offers an overview of the sociological concepts of power and authority, specifically through Weber’s lens. It discusses the types of social action Weber identifies, along with the corresponding forms of authority—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal.

17.6 Power and Authority

We now delve into the essential concepts of power and authority, both in a general sociological sense and from Weber’s specific perspective.

17.6.1 Power

In everyday language, ‘power’ implies strength or the ability to control. Sociologists define it as an individual or group’s capacity to realize desires and implement decisions

and ideas. Power involves influencing and/or controlling others' behavior, even against their will.

Weber views power as inherent in social relationships, the potential to impose one's will on another's behavior. Power surfaces in social interactions, fostering inequality as the powerful impose on others. The effect of power depends on the powerful individual's capacity to exercise it and the resistance they face. According to Weber, power can manifest across all areas of life.

Power isn't confined to politics or battles; it appears in marketplaces, lecture halls, social events, sports, academic debates, and even charity. For instance, giving alms or 'damn' subtly displays economic superiority, whether the act brings joy or despair to the recipient.

Weber outlines two primary sources of power:

- a) Power derived from a network of interests within a relatively free market. For example, sugar producers may control supply to maximize profit.
- b) Power from a structured authority system, which allocates the right to command and the duty to obey. In the military, for instance, a jawan must obey an officer's orders, with the officer's power stemming from the established system of authority.

This discussion on power naturally leads to legitimacy, a concept central to authority for Weber. Let's explore the concept of authority further.

17.6.2 Authority

Weber's term "Herrschaft," often translated as 'authority,' also means 'domination' or 'command.' It signifies a situation where a master or 'Herr' holds dominance over others. Raymond Aron (1967: 187) defines Herrschaft as the master's ability to secure obedience from those who theoretically owe it. Here, we'll use "authority" to denote Weber's Herrschaft.

The difference between power and authority lies in legitimacy: while power refers to the capacity to control, authority is legitimized power, where the master has the right to command and expects obedience.

17.6.3 Elements of Authority

For an authority system to exist, these elements are essential:

- i) An individual master or a group of masters.
- ii) An individual or group being ruled.
- iii) The ruler's intent to influence the ruled's conduct, often through commands.

- iv) Proof of influence through the ruled's compliance or obedience.
- v) Evidence, direct or indirect, that the ruled accept the ruler's commands as binding.

Authority involves a reciprocal dynamic between rulers and ruled: rulers believe in their legitimate right to exert authority, while the ruled accept this power, affirming its legitimacy.

17.7 Types of Social Action and Types of Authority

In the previous unit, Weber's concept of social action was introduced. Weber views sociology as a comprehensive social action science (Aron, 1967: 187), presenting a typology of social action, is discussed briefly here.

Types of Social Action

Weber identifies four types of social action:

- i) Zweckrational action or rational goal-oriented action. For instance, an engineer constructs a bridge using specific materials for a defined goal—completing the bridge.
- ii) Wertrational action or value-oriented rational action. An example would be a soldier sacrificing life for the country out of honor or patriotism, not material gain.
- iii) Affective action, driven by emotion. For example, if a girl reacts violently when teased, her response stems from intense irritation.
- iv) Traditional action, guided by customs or longstanding beliefs, such as performing 'pranam' to elders in traditional Indian society.

Weber's authority types often align with his social action typology, which we'll explore in the next section.

Types of Authority

As we have already said, authority is legitimate power. Weber identifies three legitimacy systems with distinct norms justifying command:

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

Traditional Authority

Legitimacy in traditional authority arises from traditional actions, rooted in customary law and ancient tradition. It holds that certain authorities command respect due to long-standing existence.

Rulers with traditional authority possess inherited personal authority, following customs and expecting obedience. Those they rule are “subjects” in the truest sense, obeying out of loyalty or respect for the ruler’s status. In India’s caste system, for example, lower castes endured oppression due to the authority’s traditional legitimacy.

Traditional authority lacks written rules and passes through generations, often maintained by relatives and close associates. Though its prevalence is now rare, monarchies are a diluted form of this authority. In the UK, the Queen is a symbolic authority; the Parliament creates laws, not her, and she does not appoint ministers. Traditional authority, in brief, gains legitimacy from traditions, requires no formal rules, and operates with personal loyalty. Weber views it as irrational, rarely found in developed societies.

Charismatic Authority

Charisma, meaning an extraordinary quality, empowers some individuals to inspire and captivate others. Charismatic authority derives legitimacy from devotion to the leader and their message. Its validity rests on the belief in the leader’s supernatural abilities. These leaders often demonstrate power through miracles or victories, which sustain their authority as long as followers believe in their abilities. Charismatic authority aligns with affective action, as disciples experience intense emotional bonds with such leaders.

Weber notes that charisma doesn’t depend on customs or written rules. It is personal, unstructured, with leaders often abandoning family responsibilities. Charismatic authority, however, faces succession challenges, as new leaders may lack charisma. To retain the original leader’s message, some form of structure emerges, leading to either traditional or rational-legal authority—a process Weber calls the routinisation of charisma. For example, if a successor inherits leadership, traditional authority arises. When charisma becomes codified, it transitions to rational-legal authority. Consequently, charismatic authority is often unstable. Historical figures such as saints, prophets, and leaders like Kabir, Nanak, Jesus, Mohammed, Lenin, and Gandhi embodied this type of authority.

Rational-Legal Authority

This authority type rests on rational and legal systems. It functions via administrative

staff who follow written rules and laws. Authority figures in these systems are selected based on qualifications, codified by official criteria. Such figures consider it a profession and are compensated, forming a rational system.

It is also legal, as it aligns with the law, which people respect and feel obligated to follow. In this system, people recognize both the rules and the authority of those enforcing them. Rational-legal authority is characteristic of modern societies and mirrors the rationalization process, which Weber sees as central to Western civilization. Examples include following a tax collector's orders due to belief in the legality of their position, or obeying a traffic officer, whose authority is recognized by law. This authority pervades not only political and administrative fields but also economic, religious, and cultural organizations. Bureaucracy is a prime kind of rational-legal authority which we are going to discuss in our next section.

17.8 Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is a structured system of administration intrinsically linked to the concept of power, particularly through its organized hierarchy and control mechanisms. In a bureaucratic system, power is distributed across various roles, with each position having clearly defined duties and authority governed by formal rules or laws. This hierarchical structure allows officials to exercise authority in a controlled and predictable way, which in turn maintains order and accountability throughout the organization. Bureaucracy's reliance on standardized rules and procedures creates a form of rational-legal authority, where power is justified by the legitimacy of established regulations rather than personal charisma or tradition. Officials are typically appointed based on technical qualifications, emphasizing expertise and skill as a source of authority within their roles.

This arrangement of power not only ensures efficiency and precision but also reinforces control by limiting individual discretion, promoting fairness by basing decisions on standardized guidelines rather than subjective judgments. However, the focus on rules and hierarchy can create rigidity, slowing down response times and sometimes placing procedures above broader organizational goals. Despite these challenges, bureaucracy remains a dominant model for exercising and maintaining power in government and large organizations, where order, predictability, and consistency are crucial for effective governance.

Characteristics of Bureaucracy

Modern official bureaucracies operate based on clear, defined areas of responsibility. These responsibilities are regulated by specific rules, often set out as laws or administrative guidelines.

1. Tasks needed for the effective running of a bureaucratic system are divided in an organized manner, with specific duties assigned to different official roles.
2. The power to make commands, essential for carrying out these tasks, is clearly outlined. Each role has rules on what authority it holds and what types of coercion—whether physical, ritualistic, or other—can be used to enforce decisions.
3. There is systematic provision to ensure these roles are continuously filled by qualified individuals. Only those who meet the formal requirements for a role are employed to ensure tasks are completed regularly and efficiently.

In public governance, this setup forms the basis of what is called “bureaucratic authority.” In private businesses, it’s known as bureaucratic management. Full-fledged bureaucracy, as described here, is found primarily in modern government institutions and in the advanced capitalist economic sector. Permanent, public office authority, defined by fixed jurisdiction, is not typical in historical contexts; rather, it’s an exception. Even large ancient empires—such as those in the Orient, Germanic and Mongolian conquest empires, or various feudal systems—often saw rulers acting through personal confidants, court attendants, or close companions rather than through a structured officialdom.

The Position of the Official

1. The official role in a bureaucracy is seen as a lifelong career. The position is typically “owned” by the official as long as they remain employed, rather than being inherited or appointed as a favour.
2. Officials receive a regular salary and frequently receive benefits such as pensions, which depend on their official standing. Generally, this employment is meant to be their main source of income.
3. For an official, the position itself offers a stable career path, where promotions are typically based on seniority or merit, evaluated through a formal process. While performance and years of service are the primary promotion factors, political influence can also play a role in career advancement.
4. An official’s role demands complete dedication and adherence to the duties

assigned by their position. Their professional activity is expected to be consistent with bureaucratic goals and norms, so much so that their daily routines, moral outlook, and social behavior align with bureaucratic requirements.

5. The position is defined by strict hierarchies. Each official answers to a superior, establishing a clear chain of command.
6. The official's obligations are to perform their designated duties strictly according to instructions, without personal feelings or arbitrary decisions influencing their actions.
7. Every official is expected to be accountable for their performance, documenting actions and decisions to maintain transparency. Written records of official actions are kept in files that remain with the office, ensuring continuity and accountability.

The Nature of Bureaucratic Authority

Bureaucratic authority is legitimate because it's rational, meaning it's based on laws and regulations that people generally accept as reasonable and valid. The rules governing bureaucratic authority are clear and can be changed through formal, consistent procedures. This flexibility contrasts with traditional authority, which is often static and based on customs. Bureaucracy's legitimacy is based on its ability to use technical knowledge and efficiency to achieve set objectives. Bureaucratic organizations are structured to accomplish specific tasks effectively, using precise rules to manage each step. Bureaucratic authority differs from other types of authority in its universal application of rules. Everyone, including officials, is expected to follow the same rules and procedures, promoting fairness and impartiality.

Officials are bound by a commitment to operate according to fixed rules, which are seen as rational and necessary for achieving the organization's goals. Personal inclinations and emotional judgments have no place in a bureaucratic structure. Bureaucratic authority relies on technical expertise to justify its decisions. Officials are chosen based on qualifications relevant to the tasks they must perform, ensuring that roles are filled by capable individuals. Bureaucratic systems are driven by the need for efficiency and effectiveness. Every role, task, and regulation is geared toward achieving organizational objectives as smoothly as possible.

Significance of the Weberian Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy operates on a high level of precision, speed, clarity, and predictability, making it one of the most effective means of achieving complex goals. Due to the structured hierarchy and defined roles, bureaucracy provides a stable and systematic approach to managing tasks, which remains consistent over time. Bureaucracies

eliminate uncertainties by applying standardized procedures across all cases, ensuring that processes are predictable and dependable. A major advantage of bureaucracy is its reliance on expertise, as officials are chosen based on qualifications rather than personal connections, leading to a high level of competence.

Bureaucratic systems support complex decision-making by allowing officials to focus on specialized tasks within a regulated framework, ensuring informed and precise actions. Bureaucratic structures operate efficiently because each role is clearly defined, and responsibilities are carried out systematically, promoting both productivity and consistency. Bureaucracy's use of written records ensures continuity, accountability, and transparency, as all actions are documented and can be reviewed if needed.

The Limitations of the setup

Bureaucracy can become impersonal, focusing on rules and regulations at the expense of individual considerations or unique circumstances. The rigid application of rules can create inflexibility, preventing officials from adapting quickly to changing situations or unexpected challenges. Bureaucratic systems are prone to excessive formalism, where following procedures can become more important than achieving the actual goals of the organization. Excessive reliance on hierarchy can lead to over-centralization, where decisions are delayed as they must pass through multiple levels of authority. Bureaucracies may develop inefficiencies if officials become more concerned with maintaining their positions than with fulfilling organizational objectives. The focus on formal qualifications can sometimes lead to favoritism based on credentials, ignoring practical skills or experience. Bureaucratic systems are vulnerable to “red tape,” where excessive documentation and formalities slow down processes and hinder prompt action.

17.9 The Dynamic Interplay between Social Action and Authority

The relationship between social action and authority is not static but evolves based on changing social, cultural, and political contexts. Authority types often coexist, and individuals may navigate between different forms of social action depending on their interactions with various power structures.

- **Hybrid Authority Contexts:** In modern bureaucratic organizations, elements of rational-legal and charismatic authority may coexist. For example, a charismatic CEO may inspire employees to take value-rational actions even within the constraints of formal rules and regulations.

- **Shifts in Authority and Social Action:** Over time, shifts in authority structures can lead to changes in dominant social actions. For instance, as traditional societies undergo modernization, traditional authority may be replaced by rational-legal authority, leading to a corresponding shift from traditional to instrumentally rational action.
- **Resistance and Counteractions:** Individuals may also resist authority by engaging in counter-social actions. For example, bureaucratic red tape may prompt employees to find creative workarounds, demonstrating a form of instrumentally rational action that challenges formal rules. Similarly, charismatic movements may emerge as reactions to rigid traditional or bureaucratic systems, inspiring followers to take affectual or value-rational actions. The integration of social action and authority typologies provides valuable insights for understanding how power is exercised, legitimized, and contested in social life. It underscores the importance of examining not only the formal structures of authority but also the subjective meanings and motivations that guide individual and collective actions.

17.9 Comparison with Marx's Class Analysis and Power Dynamics

You have already read Marx in the preceding unit therefore, I think we can make a comparison between Marx and Weber in the context of power and stratification. Weber's multidimensional view of social stratification, which includes class, status, and party, stands in contrast to Marx's primarily economic understanding of social hierarchy. Marx viewed power as inherently rooted in economic relations and class conflict, where the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat through ownership of the means of production. For Marx, political and social structures merely reflect the dominance of the ruling class, whereas Weber acknowledged the relative autonomy of status and political power from economic factors. Including this comparison would highlight Weber's broader and more nuanced approach to understanding social stratification beyond purely economic determinants. Furthermore, while Marx emphasized revolutionary change driven by class conflict, Weber recognized that social change could occur within existing institutional frameworks through the rationalization of authority and bureaucracy. A comparative discussion could illuminate how these divergent perspectives have implications for understanding power dynamics in both capitalist and post-industrial societies.

17.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, Weber's analysis of power, stratification, authority, and bureaucracy presents a comprehensive framework for understanding social organization and the dynamics of power within society. By differentiating between class, status, and party, Weber illuminates the multifaceted nature of social stratification, demonstrating how economic, social, and political factors interplay to shape individuals' and groups' positions and opportunities. This tripartite model moves beyond simplistic economic determinism, emphasizing the complexity of human interactions and the various means through which power is exerted and maintained.

Weber's distinction between power and authority highlights the importance of legitimacy in social relationships, reinforcing that authority gains acceptance not merely from the capacity to influence others but from the belief in the rightful exercise of power. Through traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal authority, Weber articulates how distinct forms of legitimacy operate within different societal contexts, further complicating our understanding of effective governance and social cohesion.

However, while bureaucratic structures are founded on principles of efficiency and rationality, they are not without limitations. The emphasis on rules and hierarchy often leads to rigidity and can impede adaptability in a rapidly changing world. Recognizing these strengths and weaknesses is crucial for contemporary societies seeking to balance the need for order and stability with the necessity for responsiveness and individual consideration. Thus, Weber's insights remain profoundly relevant as we navigate the complexities of modern social orders characterized by intertwined systems of power and authority.

17.11 Summary

Max Weber's concept of social stratification involves three interrelated dimensions: class, status, and party, which together shape individuals' positions within society. Class is primarily determined by economic factors, such as access to resources and market positions, distinguishing property owners from non-owners. Status transcends economic capital, focusing on social prestige and shared values among groups, often leading to exclusive practices that reinforce social boundaries. The concept of "party" relates to political affiliations and organized efforts to exert influence within the community, highlighting how these dimensions collectively contribute to a complex social hierarchy.

Weber argues that while economic power is significant, it is not the sole determinant of social standing. Social and legal structures maintain power dynamics, and the interplay between economic interests and social honor influences individuals' life chances. Class situations may foster collective action, but shared economic conditions alone don't guarantee unity; cultural and intellectual factors play crucial roles in encouraging mobilization. Historical instances of class struggle demonstrate that economic interests can lead to organized resistance, with examples ranging from ancient debts to contemporary labor movements.

Furthermore, Weber differentiates between types of authority—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal—which illustrate the legitimacy of power structures. Traditional authority stems from long-standing customs, while charismatic authority relies on the extraordinary qualities of leaders. In contrast, rational-legal authority is grounded in established laws and administrative procedures, dominating modern bureaucratic systems. Bureaucracy itself is characterized by a structured hierarchy and a focus on efficiency, but it is susceptible to rigidity and the potential prioritization of rules over relational dynamics. Despite potential limitations, Weberian bureaucracy is a foundational model for effective governance in complex societies.

17.12 Questions

Short Answer Questions:

1. What is the focus of this unit in relation to Weber's theories on power and authority?
2. How are Weber's ideas on power and authority introduced in this unit?
3. How does Weber define the concept of power?
4. What distinction does Weber make between power and authority?
5. In what ways do sociologists describe power?
6. Where, according to Weber, can power be observed in society?
7. What does Weber's term "Herrschaft" signify, and how is it translated?
8. How does Weber differentiate between power and authority?
9. What are the core elements needed for a system of authority to exist?
10. How does the reciprocal relationship between rulers and the ruled establish authority?

11. What are the four types of social action identified by Weber?
12. Why is it important to link types of authority with types of social action?
13. What is meant by “Zweckrational” action in Weber’s typology of social action?
14. How does “Affective action” differ from other types of social action?
15. What are the three types of authority discussed by Weber?
16. How does Weber establish legitimacy as central to each type of authority?
17. What forms the basis of traditional authority according to Weber?
18. How is authority inherited in traditional forms of governance?
19. How does Weber define charisma and its role in authority?
20. What role does emotional attachment play in charismatic authority?
21. How does rational-legal authority differ from other authority types?
22. Why is rational-legal authority closely linked with the concept of rationalization?
23. How does the lack of conformity between Weber’s typology of social action and authority lead to open discussions?
24. What are the common issues faced when trying to conform types of social action with authority types?

Broad Questions:

1. Describe the connection between this unit and the earlier discussions on Weber’s ideal type and the link between religion and economy.
2. Summarize the objectives of this unit concerning Weber’s contributions to understanding power and authority.
3. Discuss how Weber views power as an aspect of social relationships.
4. Explain Weber’s views on how power varies based on the opposition it faces and the capacity to exert it.
5. Illustrate with examples how power is exercised across different contexts in society.
6. Describe the two contrasting sources of power as discussed by Weber, with examples.
7. How does Raymond Aron interpret Weber’s concept of Herrschaft, and what does it imply about authority?
8. Discuss the relationship between power and legitimacy in the formation of authority.
9. Explain how the internalization of obedience plays a role in reinforcing authority.

10. Describe each element that Weber considers essential to the concept of authority.
11. Discuss the concept of social action as defined by Weber and its relevance in sociology.
12. Explain how Weber's typology of social action relates to the forms of authority he discusses.
13. Describe the four types of social action that Weber identifies with relevant examples.
14. How does traditional action reflect the customs and beliefs within a society according to Weber?
15. Compare and contrast Weber's three systems of legitimation in the context of authority.
16. How does each type of authority reflect Weber's understanding of social structure?
17. Describe the caste system in India as an example of traditional authority.
18. Discuss how traditional authority operates without written rules, based on Weber's analysis.
19. Describe how Weber views the concept of "routinisation of charisma" and its effects on authority succession.
20. How does charismatic authority differ from traditional and rational-legal authority in terms of structure and stability?
21. Explain how rational-legal authority operates in modern society and its association with professional qualifications.
22. Provide examples of rational-legal authority and discuss its role in modern organizations, including economic and political structures.
23. Analyze the lack of conformity between Weber's typologies of social action and authority and why this presents challenges.
24. Discuss possible interpretations of Weber's classifications in the context of the lack of conformity between social action and authority.

17.13 Reference

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17.14 Glossary

1. **Social Action:** Any action carried out by an individual or group that carries subjective meaning and is oriented toward the behavior of others.
2. **Verstehen:** A German term meaning “interpretive understanding,” central to Weber’s methodology. It involves empathetically understanding the subjective meanings individuals attach to their actions.
3. **Power:** The ability of an individual or group to realize their will, even in the face of resistance from others.
4. **Authority:** Legitimate power accepted by those who are subject to it. Weber categorizes authority into traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal types.
5. **Rational-Legal Authority:** Authority based on formal rules and legal procedures that are impersonal and standardized.
6. **Traditional Authority:** Authority based on long-standing customs, traditions, and inherited norms.
7. **Charismatic Authority:** Authority derived from the exceptional personal qualities of a leader, often inspiring emotional loyalty from followers.
8. **Stratification:** The division of society into hierarchical layers based on class, status, and party.
9. **Class:** A group of individuals who share a similar market position in terms of wealth and economic resources.
10. **Status:** Social honor or prestige attributed to an individual or group based on cultural, social, or lifestyle factors.
11. **Party:** Political or organized groups that seek to influence social and political power structures.
12. **Instrumentally Rational Action:** A type of social action where individuals choose the most efficient means to achieve specific goals.

13. **Value-Rational Action:** Social action motivated by a commitment to a particular value or belief, regardless of the outcome.
14. **Affectual Action:** Social action driven by emotions and feelings rather than rational deliberation.
15. **Traditional Action:** Social action based on established customs and habitual practices.
16. **Bureaucracy:** A formal organizational structure characterized by hierarchical authority, rule-bound decision-making, and division of labor.
17. **Legitimacy:** The acceptance of authority as rightful and justified by those subject to it.
18. **Market Position:** An individual's economic standing based on access to goods, services, and resources.
19. **Empirical Inquiry:** A research approach based on observation and evidence rather than abstract reasoning or speculation.
20. **Resistance:** Actions taken to oppose or challenge authority or power structures.
21. **Hybrid Authority:** A situation where elements of different types of authority (e.g., charismatic and rational-legal) coexist within an organization or social system.
22. **Temporal Dimension:** The orientation of social actions toward past, present, or future events.
23. **Institutional Power:** Power exercised through formal organizational structures and established rules.
24. **Legitimation:** The process through which power or authority becomes accepted and justified within a social context.
25. **Social Change:** The transformation of social structures, cultural patterns, or power dynamics over time.

Unit 18 □ Religion

Structure

- 18.1 Learning Objectives**
- 18.2 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: Weber's Central Thesis**
- 18.3 The Concept of Asceticism**
- 18.4 Defining the 'Spirit' of Capitalism**
- 18.5 Uniqueness of the 'Spirit' in Modern Capitalism: Traditional vs. Modern Capitalism**
- 18.6 The Influence of Calvinist Doctrine on Capitalist Ethos**
- 18.7 The Divine Pre-ordination**
- 18.8 Predestination, Anxiety, and the Rise of the Work Ethic**
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18.1 Learning Objectives

- To understand Weber's central thesis on the role of Protestant ethics in capitalism.
- To analyse the impact of Calvinist predestination on disciplined labor and economic activity.
- To examine the shift of asceticism from monastic withdrawal to economic engagement.
- To comprehend Weber's distinction between the 'spirit' of capitalism and traditional economies.

18.2 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: Weber's Central Thesis and Fundamental Aims

Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is an intellectual milestone in sociological thought, offering a profound and contentious explanation of how Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, fostered the rise of modern capitalism. His argument challenges the materialist determinism of Karl Marx by suggesting that ideas, values, and religious beliefs actively shape economic systems rather than being mere reflections of them. Weber's concern was not simply with economic history but with understanding the cultural and psychological conditions that allowed capitalism to emerge in a distinct and rationalized form in the West. He observed that Protestant regions of Europe were more economically advanced, with a greater presence of business leaders, skilled workers, and disciplined labour forces than their Catholic counterparts. This was not, he argued, the result of material conditions alone but stemmed from an inner-worldly asceticism promoted by Protestant ethics, which conditioned individuals to adopt disciplined work habits, practice economic rationality, and reject ostentatious consumption.

At the heart of Weber's argument is his engagement with Calvinist theology, particularly the doctrine of predestination, which posited that God had already determined who would achieve salvation and who would be damned. This created a profound anxiety among believers, for there was no sacrament, no priestly absolution, nor any worldly act that could alter one's fate. However, the need for certainty led to the interpretation that material success could be taken as a sign of divine favor. This encouraged Protestants to engage in methodical and disciplined economic activity, not for hedonistic indulgence but as a form of religious duty. Unlike medieval Catholic monastic asceticism, which demanded withdrawal from worldly affairs, Protestant asceticism was active within the world. Hard work, thrift, and the systematic reinvestment of wealth were no longer seen as secular concerns but as expressions of faith. Through this rationalization of labour and the rejection of unproductive leisure, Protestantism instilled an economic ethic that became the psychological foundation of capitalist enterprise.

Weber was keen to demonstrate that this religiously inspired discipline did not merely encourage wealth accumulation but fundamentally transformed attitudes toward economic behaviour. Traditional societies viewed economic activity as limited by necessity; wealth was pursued for survival or luxury, and profit was often seen as morally dubious. In contrast, the Protestant ethic redefined economic success as an

ethical obligation. Work became an end in itself, not just a means to an end. Profit was not to be wasted on indulgence but reinvested systematically, contributing to the rational organization of production and trade. Over time, the original religious motivations receded, yet the capitalist system retained its spirit of disciplined, rational accumulation. This shift marked what Weber termed the “disenchantment” of the world, as religious ideals were secularized into the impersonal mechanisms of modern economic life.

The historical significance of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* lies in its attempt to explain why capitalism emerged as a dominant economic system in Western Europe while failing to develop in the same way in other civilizations. Weber did not argue that Protestantism directly caused capitalism but that it created a unique moral and psychological climate conducive to its expansion. This insight led him to contrast Western capitalism with other economic cultures, such as Confucian China or Hindu India, where religious worldviews emphasized harmony, fatalism, or detachment rather than the disciplined labour required for capitalist rationalization. However, his conclusions have faced intense criticism. Some historians argue that capitalism predated Protestantism, citing flourishing commercial economies in Catholic Italy and Flanders. Others challenge Weber’s emphasis on religion, contending that institutional developments, technological advancements, and colonial expansion played more decisive roles in capitalism’s rise.

Despite these critiques, Weber’s work remains foundational because it illuminated how values and ideologies shape economic and social structures. His theory of rationalization extends beyond economics to bureaucracy, law, and governance, making it a crucial lens for understanding modernity. What began as a religiously motivated ethic ultimately evolved into what Weber termed the “iron cage” of capitalism, a system where individuals continue to work tirelessly, not out of religious conviction, but because economic rationality and competition demand it. Thus, the spirit of capitalism, once rooted in theological anxiety, has become a secular compulsion, governing the rhythms of contemporary life with an impersonal and relentless force.

18.3 The Concept of Asceticism

Weber’s assertion that asceticism “escaped from the religious cage” and infiltrated economic life is one of the most evocative elements of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It marks the transformation of a religiously motivated ethic into

an autonomous social force that reshaped the dynamics of economic behavior and social organization. Asceticism, in its original monastic form, was deeply embedded in religious practice, advocating rigorous self-denial, the renunciation of material pleasures, and a commitment to spiritual purity. Within the monastic tradition, this asceticism was confined within the cloisters of religious institutions, demanding that individuals turn away from the world to attain higher ethical states. However, Weber identified a crucial shift in the wake of Protestant reforms, particularly those inspired by Calvinist theology, where the ascetic impulse was redirected toward engagement with the world rather than withdrawal from it.

This transition signified a radical departure from the medieval Catholic ethic of salvation through sacraments and ecclesiastical authority. Protestantism, particularly in its Calvinist iteration, dissolved the protective enclosure of monastic asceticism and infused it into the daily lives of believers. Since salvation was preordained and unknowable, individuals sought assurance through signs of divine favor, which they increasingly identified with disciplined labour, rational economic conduct, and restrained consumption. Work became a spiritual calling, a *Beruf*, wherein ascetic self-denial was no longer expressed through renunciation of the world but through meticulous engagement with it. The ethos of Protestant asceticism, now freed from its religious enclosure, did not merely influence individuals' attitudes toward labour but fundamentally altered the structure of economic life itself. It imposed a moral discipline upon economic action, ensuring that profit was not squandered in luxury but reinvested in productive enterprises, thus accelerating the systematic expansion of capitalism.

Weber's characterization of asceticism's transformation culminates in his chilling metaphor of the "iron cage," a state in which the once-religious discipline of self-denial had become an impersonal, inescapable force of economic rationality. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the religious justifications for ascetic labour had eroded, yet the structured discipline and compulsion to work persisted, now embedded within the capitalist system itself. The Protestant ascetic no longer needed theological reassurance to justify his relentless labour; the mechanisms of capitalism had absorbed and secularized the ethic of disciplined work. What was once a voluntary expression of faith had hardened into an impersonal, coercive structure, compelling individuals to conform to its logic irrespective of their personal beliefs? Weber's lament, that the "idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs," captures the tragic paradox of modernity: a world governed by the logic of economic rationality, where the original spiritual motivations have dissipated, yet their compulsive structures remain. Asceticism, once a pathway to

salvation, had become a mechanism of economic domination, leaving individuals trapped in a system that no longer required religious justification, only obedience to its relentless demands.

18.4 Defining the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism

The ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism Defined In order then to provide evidence for the claim that asceticism had escaped the religious cage and had taken a leap into everyday economic life, Weber set out to identify what he called the ‘spirit of capitalism.’ He began by noting that when compared to other systems of money making and other economies of wealth, Western capitalism was alone in developing a central philosophy or spirit which could be identified by three overriding imperatives or demands. First was the devotion to amassing wealth and profit beyond the personal needs and wants of the individual; second was the commitment to unrelieved toil and work coupled with self-denial and the renunciation of luxury and excess; and third was the use of personal restraint in the world and the avoidance of the use of wealth for purposes of private enjoyment. It was this ethical ‘spirit,’ Weber believed, that shaped Western capitalism as an economic way of life (Weber, 1930, pp. 27-28).

To show how the ‘spirit’ manifested itself in economic life, Weber turned his attention to the works of Benjamin Franklin, who he believed represented the characteristics of the ‘spirit of capitalism’ in its ‘classical purity.’ Franklin, in fact, was a successful entrepreneur who had written a self-help guide in 1736 called *Necessary Hints to Those That Would Be Rich* and, in 1748, he followed it with another guide called *Advice to Young Tradesmen*. Franklin put forward a set of ethical maxims about how to be successful in business and stated the maxims in the following way:

Remember, that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of the day, though he spends but sixpence during his idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.

And

Remember, that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again is seven (Weber, 1930, pp. 49-50).

As far as Weber is concerned, there were many capitalisms: adventurous capitalism, speculative capitalism, usurious capitalism, and modern industrial or ascetic capitalism.

By drawing our attention to the ‘spirit,’ Weber is saying that the religious forces shaping ascetic capitalism in the West are unique.

What struck Weber about Franklin’s language was not its practical outlook toward money-making, nor its insistence that honest individuals pay their creditors promptly, but rather that the demand for promptness, prudence, honesty, and saving appears within the context of a proclaimed ethical duty to earn more and more capital. ‘Truly, what is preached here,’ said Weber, ‘is not simply a means of making one’s way in the world’ on a practical basis, but rather ‘a peculiar ethic,’ and a particular way of regulating life conduct based on a set of ethical maxims which receive their force from the religious sphere. Weber went on to say that any ‘infraction of these ethical maxims were treated not as foolishness but as a forgetfulness of duty’ (Weber, 1930, p. 51).

In Weber’s view, therefore, Franklin’s words go beyond the mere suggestion of prudent business advice. Rather, they refer to a specific ethic or ‘spirit,’ and ‘take on the character of ethically coloured religious maxims for shaping the conduct of life’ (Weber, 1930, p. 52). Weber went on to point out that while all of Franklin’s recommendations to be punctual, save money, exhibit time thrift, and work hard appeared to have practical significance, they contained what Weber thought was a ‘surplus of religious virtue’ (Weber, 1930, p. 52). In fact, Weber stated that Franklin believed that the practical advice he offered had virtues that were divine in origin, claiming that they ‘were intended to lead the individual along the path of righteousness.’ This led Weber to argue that ‘something more than mere utility was involved,’ and that all these ‘psychological sanctions’ related to restraint, time thrift, punctuality, and prudent savings showed that religious beliefs and practices gave explicit ‘direction to practical conduct in the world and held the individual to it’ (Weber, 1930, p. 52).

Weber maintained that, from what Franklin had said, it was clear that the ‘spirit of capitalism’ had the effect of putting forward the expectation of hard work, restraint in life conduct, and the pursuit of wealth as a moral duty and, in doing so, it made the non-performance of work and the absence of restraint an ‘infraction’ of such duty (Weber, 1930, p. 52). Weber then went on to argue that the elevation of ‘hard work’ and ‘prudent saving’ to a moral duty was historically new and had not been seen before in other economies and other forms of capitalism. In this respect, the ‘spirit’ of capitalism can therefore be defined as the imposition of ‘religious’ maxims onto everyday economic activity, which had not been seen before in previous systems of money-making. In addition, Weber thought that coupled with the pattern of self-denial in economic matters, the spirit of capitalism became a method for regulating life

conduct in the world and of controlling one's relation to the material world through asceticism and conscious self-denial.

18.5 Uniqueness of the 'Spirit' in Modern Capitalism: Traditional vs Modern Capitalism

To this point, Weber had argued that the 'spirit' of capitalism was unique in two related respects. First, it developed only in modern Western capitalism and was lacking in other societies where capitalism and economies of wealth had existed. Second, it indicated that the appearance of ethical maxims in economic and commercial activity implied the presence of religious maxims. In order, then, to support the argument that the 'spirit' of capitalism developed only in the West, Weber went on to compare two forms of capitalism which he referred to as 'modern' and 'traditional' (Weber, 1930, pp. 59-60). In modern capitalism, employers used money-saving techniques in pricing jobs according to different rates, and they did this, he argued, in order to obtain as much productivity from the worker as possible. In cases where high profits prevailed over heavy losses, or where employers sought to speed up production, piece rates in modern capitalism added incentives for workers to earn more money by working harder. This simultaneously benefited employers and workers at the same time since it maximized profits and wages. In the case of traditional capitalism, however, the attempt to raise piece rates had the effect of creating less rather than more incentive for workers to earn more money because workers were not prepared to work harder to increase their wages. According to Weber, "the worker reacted to the increase by decreasing the amount of work" (Weber, 1930, p. 60). In traditional capitalism, therefore, "the opportunity to earn more was less attractive than that of working less" since the traditional worker "did not ask how much they could earn in a day if they do as much as possible? Instead, they asked: how much must I work in order to earn the wages which I earned before and which take care of my traditional needs?" (Weber, 1930, p. 60). While traditionalism had existed previously in the economies of China and India, and briefly in Europe of the Middle Ages, in all these cases, said Weber, "the particular ethical spirit" in money-making and the pursuit of wealth "was lacking" (Weber, 1930, p. 61).

18.5 The Influence of Calvinist Doctrine on Capitalist Ethos

Max Weber, in his analysis of the ‘religious spirit’ underpinning modern capitalism, turned his focus to the theological reforms introduced by John Calvin (1509–1564). He sought to explore the interplay between Protestant religious principles and their manifestations in economic behavior. Historically, Calvin emerged as a leading figure of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, having received training in theology and religious studies in France. His engagement with ecclesiastical studies deepened around 1529, leading him to critique Catholic theology for its perceived leniency in matters of salvation and its failure to emphasize the renunciation of worldly pleasures.

According to Calvin, Catholic teachings promoted an indulgent notion of salvation, wherein individuals could attain divine grace through a cyclical process of repentance, good deeds, confession, and participation in sacred sacraments. In his view, this doctrinal framework implied that even sinners could ultimately secure redemption. Disagreeing with this perspective, Calvin found Catholicism’s approach excessively permissive and lenient. As a result, upon aligning himself with the Protestant reformist movement in France, he articulated a markedly more restrictive theology of salvation. By 1535, Calvin contended that certain injunctions within the Old Testament imposed rigid moral restrictions on worldly conduct. He accordingly advanced a strict interpretation of these scriptures, culminating in the formulation of a doctrine known as predestination. As Calvin’s teachings gained traction across Europe and influenced Protestant thought, they marked a decisive shift in religious ideology, initiating a phase of reform that placed stringent limitations on human actions. His theological arguments were systematized in 1536 when he published *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, a foundational text expounding his vision of predestination.

At the heart of Calvin’s theological reforms lay the doctrine of predestination, which rested upon four fundamental tenets. The first asserted that even before the creation of the world, God had preordained the eternal fate of every human being, categorizing them into two groups—the elect, who were destined for salvation, and the condemned, who were irrevocably damned. Those belonging to the elect would receive eternal grace and divine favour, while the rest were doomed to perpetual suffering in the afterlife. The second tenet stipulated that no individual could ascertain their status—whether saved or damned—until after death. Since Calvin maintained that there were no discernible signs distinguishing the elect from the condemned, believers lived in a

perpetual state of uncertainty regarding their spiritual fate. The third principle emphasized the irreversibility of divine decrees; no priest, religious ritual, good deeds, or act of contrition could alter God's predetermined judgment. Unlike Catholic doctrine, which allowed for absolution through sacraments such as confession and communion, Calvinism held that divine grace could not be influenced by human intervention. Lastly, Calvin argued that God's transcendence rendered Him inaccessible to direct human supplication, meaning that prayer and religious appeals had no bearing on an individual's salvation.

Weber viewed Calvin's doctrine as a radical departure from Catholic theological traditions. In Catholicism, believers could atone for their transgressions through acts of penance, prayer, and devotion, thereby regaining divine favour. By contrast, Calvinism eliminated any possibility of redemption, fostering an acute sense of existential anxiety among its adherents. Weber identified three unprecedented consequences of this doctrine. Firstly, it completely negated the Catholic notion that salvation could be attained through works, sacraments, or divine forgiveness. Secondly, it created an overwhelming sense of spiritual isolation, as believers could no longer rely on external signs or rituals to reassure them of their salvation. The loss of this certainty plunged Protestants into a profound state of 'salvation anxiety,' wherein the most pressing existential question became: *Am I among the elect?* This uncertainty was exacerbated by the fact that divine selection was inscrutable, leaving Protestants with no tangible means of verifying their spiritual standing. Thirdly, the doctrine stripped believers of any agency over their own salvation, as prayer and religious observance held no sway over God's will. This theological shift engendered a crisis of faith, compelling Protestants to seek alternative ways of affirming their religious standing.

As adherents of Calvinism struggled with the implications of predestination, Weber argued that their relationship to both their faith and the social world underwent a profound transformation. The elimination of sacraments and confession as mediatory avenues to salvation led to an erosion of communal trust, as Calvinists were warned against placing faith in worldly relationships. Moreover, the belief that God was beyond human reach reinforced a sense of spiritual isolation, depriving believers of traditional sources of religious comfort. This isolation was further intensified by the principle of worldly asceticism, which dictated that material pleasures be renounced and that believers maintain an attitude of vigilance against earthly temptations. Since avenues for seeking divine reassurance were closed off, Protestants sought validation through an alternative means—diligent labor. Weber contended that the withdrawal of sacraments, confession, and the possibility of divine grace fostered an ethic of relentless

self-examination. In response to their inner turmoil, Protestants turned to disciplined work as a way of demonstrating their worthiness before God. This pursuit of industriousness, fueled by a deep-seated need for self-justification, played a crucial role in shaping the ethos of modern capitalism.

The Calvinist ethic thus engendered a form of religious individualism, compelling believers to navigate their faith in solitude. The doctrine of *sola fide*, or ‘faith alone,’ emerged as a defining principle of this theological orientation, underscoring the idea that salvation was an inscrutable divine decree beyond human influence. In Weber’s analysis, this sense of isolation and self-reliance, combined with an emphasis on disciplined labour, laid the groundwork for the emergence of a capitalist spirit driven by methodical, rational economic conduct.

18.7 The Divine Pre-ordination

Max Weber’s exploration of the religious underpinnings of capitalism led him to engage deeply with the theological reforms introduced by John Calvin. As a major figure of the Protestant Reformation, Calvin, trained in theology and religious studies in France, developed a doctrine that challenged Catholic teachings, which he perceived as excessively lenient in matters of salvation. His dissatisfaction stemmed from the Catholic Church’s belief in the possibility of redemption through acts of repentance, good deeds, and sacraments, a system that, in his view, allowed individuals too much leeway in securing divine grace. Calvin’s engagement with reformist thought led him to articulate a far more rigid theological framework, culminating in the doctrine of predestination, which became a defining feature of his religious philosophy. By 1535, he had already begun asserting that the Old Testament imposed strict moral constraints on human behaviour, a position that was further elaborated in his seminal work, *The Institutes of Christian Religion* (1536), which provided a systematic exposition of his belief in divine preordination.

At the core of Calvin’s theology was the conviction that God had predetermined the fate of every human being even before the world came into existence, categorizing individuals into two groups: the elect, who were destined for salvation, and the condemned, who were irreversibly doomed. This absolute decree meant that no human action—whether good deeds, prayer, or religious devotion—could alter one’s predestined fate. Moreover, individuals could never ascertain their status in this divine order during their lifetime, leading to an intense and unresolvable anxiety regarding their spiritual destiny. Unlike Catholicism, which allowed for absolution through

sacraments, Calvinism denied believers any control over their own salvation, asserting that God's will was inscrutable and beyond human influence. This theological shift, in Weber's view, had profound consequences, as it left Protestants in a state of perpetual uncertainty, stripped of the traditional means of seeking reassurance about their spiritual standing. With no sacraments, no confession, and no priestly mediation to provide comfort, believers faced a deeply isolating existential predicament—one that severed their dependence on religious institutions and directed their focus toward a different means of self-validation.

In response to this acute spiritual anxiety, Calvinists turned toward rigorous self-discipline and industrious labour as a means of demonstrating their worthiness before God. Though their salvation remained unknowable, success in worldly endeavours came to be seen as an indirect sign of divine favour, fostering an ethic of relentless hard work and ascetic self-restraint. This emphasis on disciplined labour, Weber argued, played a foundational role in shaping the ethos of modern capitalism, as it encouraged individuals to engage in rational economic activity, systematic accumulation, and efficient management of resources. The renunciation of material pleasures, coupled with an insistence on productivity and frugality, created a culture where wealth was not to be frivolously enjoyed but rather reinvested, leading to the rise of a capitalist spirit driven by methodical work and economic rationality. The Calvinist ethic thus instilled a profound sense of religious individualism, where believers navigated their faith in solitude, guided not by institutionalized religion but by their own internalized sense of divine duty. In Weber's analysis, this transformation laid the ideological groundwork for the development of capitalism, as the pursuit of economic success became not just a material endeavour but a moral imperative.

18.8 Predestination, Anxiety, and the Rise of the Work Ethic

Weber explored the relationship between Calvinist salvation theology and the rise of the commercial spirit, identifying two fundamental links between them. Firstly, he argued that Calvin's doctrine of salvation, particularly its emphasis on predestination, created a profound psychological effect on Protestants. Since Calvinism denied believers any certainty about their status as the elect, they were left searching for signs of divine favour. Unlike Catholicism, which provided a clear path to salvation through confession, atonement, and good works, Protestantism removed such assurances, leading to what Weber termed a "crisis of proof." Protestants, uncertain of their salvation, turned to rigorous worldly asceticism, adopting a disciplined and methodical approach to life

that could serve as a form of reassurance. Hard work and self-denial in one's calling became a means to overcome spiritual anxiety, with labour itself becoming an act of devotion, a substitute for grace, and a way to dispel the fear of damnation.

Weber further connected this ascetic ethos to economic life. The disciplined labour encouraged by Protestant teachings not only shaped personal conduct but also laid the foundation for an emerging capitalist ethic. The Protestant emphasis on thrift, restraint, and industry cultivated a mind set in which accumulating wealth was not seen as indulgence but as evidence of divine favour. In this framework, material success was interpreted as a sign of spiritual worth. Protestant asceticism, unlike its monastic counterpart that required withdrawal from worldly affairs, operated within the world, regulating everyday conduct and bringing economic activity under strict rational control. Weber contrasted this "inner-worldly asceticism" with "other-worldly asceticism" found in earlier religious traditions, where renouncing the world and seeking spiritual elevation through isolation was the ideal. In Protestantism, however, believers were expected to remain engaged in the world while practicing self-discipline, making economic activity itself an arena for religious expression.

Weber also suggested that the Protestant work ethic played a crucial role in shaping modern capitalism. The transformation of monastic self-denial into disciplined labour in economic life meant that the values of punctuality, industriousness, and frugality were no longer confined to religious practice but became essential virtues in commercial enterprise. He even implied that the logic of religious faith, which once revolved around earning divine grace, had been transmuted into the logic of economic credit—where faith in one's calling mirrored faith in salvation. In this way, Weber traced a historical and psychological link between Protestant religious convictions and the emergence of a systematic, rational approach to economic life, suggesting that capitalism's ethos of discipline, efficiency, and relentless work owed much to the theological anxieties born from Calvinist predestination.

18.9 Asceticism, Capitalism, and the Evolution of the 'Calling'

Max Weber examined the transformation of the concept of the 'calling' and its connection to commercial vocations, particularly within Protestant theology. The idea of a religious calling can be traced back to medieval Catholic doctrine, where it primarily referred to a divine summons to a religious life dedicated to God through acts of devotion. By the seventeenth century, Martin Luther's influence led to a

significant redefinition of the term. In Catholic theology, the calling initially signified religious service that transcended the secular world, often manifesting in monastic withdrawal. This perspective was rooted in the belief that worldly experiences were insignificant when compared to spiritual salvation.

However, Protestant theology, particularly under the influence of John Calvin, redefined the ‘calling’ to emphasize engagement with worldly duties. Unlike Catholicism, which associated faith with communal religious practices, Protestantism promoted individual faith, encapsulated in the doctrine of *sola fide*—faith alone. This shift led to a fundamental change in religious life, where engagement in everyday labour was no longer seen as spiritually neutral but as a morally justified activity. Calvinist doctrine reinforced the idea that Protestants could demonstrate their faith through disciplined work, transforming labour into a spiritual endeavour. This separation from the collective church community created an unprecedented sense of personal isolation, intensifying the individual’s need for moral reassurance through work.

Weber argued that the consequence of *sola fide* was the moral validation of worldly activity, particularly in economic pursuits. Protestant asceticism introduced a strong ethical imperative to reshape the world through self-discipline and labour. The ‘calling’ underwent a second transformation as it merged with economic activity, making commercial engagement a religiously sanctioned pursuit. No previous religion had fused spiritual life with worldly labour in such a manner, giving economic endeavours a moral significance. Work became synonymous with virtue, and individuals came to view their professional vocations as divinely ordained. This internalization of religious duty in commercial life reinforced the belief that success in business was a sign of divine favour.

This new interpretation of the ‘calling’ resulted in the emergence of a disciplined work ethic, where toil and rational economic behaviour became expressions of religious devotion. Labour was not merely a means of survival but a demonstration of ascetic virtue. The idea of self-control and self-regulation in economic life became central to Protestant morality, leading to an aversion to spontaneous enjoyment. In Weber’s view, the Protestant ethic thus laid the foundation for capitalism by instilling a sense of duty in economic activity and reinforcing the belief that financial success was a reflection of divine grace.

18.10 Conclusion

Max Weber's analysis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* offers a compelling argument on the interplay between religious beliefs and economic systems, particularly how Protestant asceticism fostered the disciplined work ethic essential to capitalism's emergence. His exploration of Calvinist predestination reveals how spiritual anxiety led to a relentless pursuit of economic success as an indirect sign of divine favour. By transforming ascetic self-denial into a force that structured everyday labour and rational economic conduct, Protestantism fundamentally reshaped the meaning of work, turning it into both a moral duty and an instrument of self-justification. Weber's distinction between traditional and modern capitalism underscores the uniqueness of Western economic rationality, where wealth accumulation became not just a means of survival but a moral imperative. Ultimately, his work demonstrates that capitalism's development was not solely a product of material conditions but was deeply rooted in cultural and ideological transformations that secularized religious virtues into economic compulsion.

18.11 Summary

Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* explores how religious beliefs, particularly Calvinist Protestantism, played a crucial role in shaping the emergence of modern capitalism. He argues that the doctrine of predestination created deep spiritual anxiety, as believers had no way of knowing their salvation status. This uncertainty led to a disciplined work ethic, where economic success was interpreted as a sign of divine favour. Unlike Catholic monastic asceticism, which required withdrawal from the world, Protestant asceticism encouraged engagement in economic life, promoting hard work, thrift, and rational wealth accumulation. Weber highlights the transformation of the 'calling' into a worldly vocation, where labour became a moral obligation. Over time, the original religious motivations faded, but the structured discipline of work persisted, becoming the driving force of capitalist rationality. His analysis underscores that capitalism was not merely an economic development but was deeply influenced by religious and cultural shifts that turned ascetic values into economic principles.

18.12 Questions

Short Answer Questions

1. What is Weber's central thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*?
2. How does Weber contrast Protestant asceticism with Catholic monastic asceticism?
3. What role does Calvinist predestination play in shaping economic behaviour?
4. What does Weber mean by the 'spirit' of capitalism?
5. How did the Protestant concept of the 'calling' differ from its Catholic interpretation?
6. What is Weber's argument about the link between religious values and economic rationality?
7. Why does Weber believe Protestant asceticism contributed to the rise of capitalism?
8. What is the significance of Benjamin Franklin's writings in Weber's analysis?
9. How does Weber differentiate between traditional and modern capitalism?
10. What is meant by Weber's concept of the 'iron cage' of capitalism?

Long Answer Questions

1. Explain Weber's argument on how Protestant asceticism influenced the emergence of capitalism.
2. Discuss the impact of Calvinist theology, particularly the doctrine of predestination, on the Protestant work ethic.
3. Analyse the transformation of the concept of the 'calling' in Protestant theology and its role in shaping economic conduct.
4. Compare and contrast Weber's concept of the 'spirit' of capitalism with traditional economic practices in other civilizations.
5. Examine Weber's distinction between 'inner-worldly asceticism' and 'other-worldly asceticism' and their economic implications.
6. Critically evaluate Weber's argument that capitalism was shaped by religious ideologies rather than purely material conditions.
7. Discuss the psychological effects of predestination on Protestant believers and how it influenced their engagement with economic life.
8. Explain how Weber links the Protestant ethic to rational economic organization and systematic wealth accumulation.

9. How does Weber's theory of rationalization extend beyond economics to other aspects of modern life?
10. Assess the criticisms of Weber's thesis and alternative explanations for the rise of capitalism.

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18.14 Glossary

1. **Asceticism** – A lifestyle characterized by self-discipline, self-denial, and renunciation of worldly pleasures, originally practiced in monastic traditions but later adapted into Protestant work ethics.
2. **Calling (Beruf)** – A concept in Protestant theology signifying that work and labor in the secular world are divine duties, transforming worldly occupations into moral and religious obligations.
3. **Calvinism** – A branch of Protestantism founded by John Calvin, emphasizing predestination, strict moral discipline, and hard work as religious virtues.
4. **Predestination** – The Calvinist doctrine that God has already determined who will be saved (the elect) and who will be damned, with no possibility of altering one's fate through actions or prayers.

5. **The Protestant Ethic** – Weber’s concept describing the disciplined work habits, frugality, and rational economic behaviour encouraged by Protestant beliefs, particularly Calvinism.
 6. **Spirit of Capitalism** – A mind set or ethical framework that promotes continuous labour, wealth accumulation, and reinvestment, influenced by Protestant values and essential to the rise of modern capitalism.
 7. **Inner-worldly Asceticism** – The Protestant practice of disciplined self-denial while actively engaging in the world, contrasting with monastic asceticism, which requires withdrawal from worldly affairs.
 8. **Other-worldly Asceticism** – A form of religious devotion that rejects worldly engagement, often practiced in monastic traditions where material existence is considered inferior to spiritual life.
 9. **Iron Cage** – Weber’s metaphor for the rigid, impersonal, and inescapable system of economic rationality that capitalism created, where individuals are compelled to work endlessly, no longer driven by religious conviction but by economic necessity.
 10. **Rationalization** – The process by which traditional and religious values are replaced by efficiency, calculation, and structured organization in economic, political, and social life.
 11. **Disenchantment** – Weber’s term for the decline of religious explanations in modern society, where spiritual beliefs are replaced by secular, rational, and bureaucratic structures.
 12. **Benjamin Franklin’s Maxims** – Ethical principles promoting hard work, thrift, punctuality, and financial prudence, cited by Weber as an example of the ‘spirit’ of capitalism.
 13. **Traditional Capitalism** – Economic activity focused on subsistence and immediate needs, where workers seek only enough income to maintain their traditional way of life, rather than maximizing profit.
 14. **Modern Capitalism** – A system characterized by continuous reinvestment, structured labour, and rational economic practices aimed at profit maximization and long-term growth.
- Sola Fide** – The Protestant doctrine of “faith alone,” which emphasizes that salvation comes through faith rather than through church sacraments or good works, leading to religious individualism.