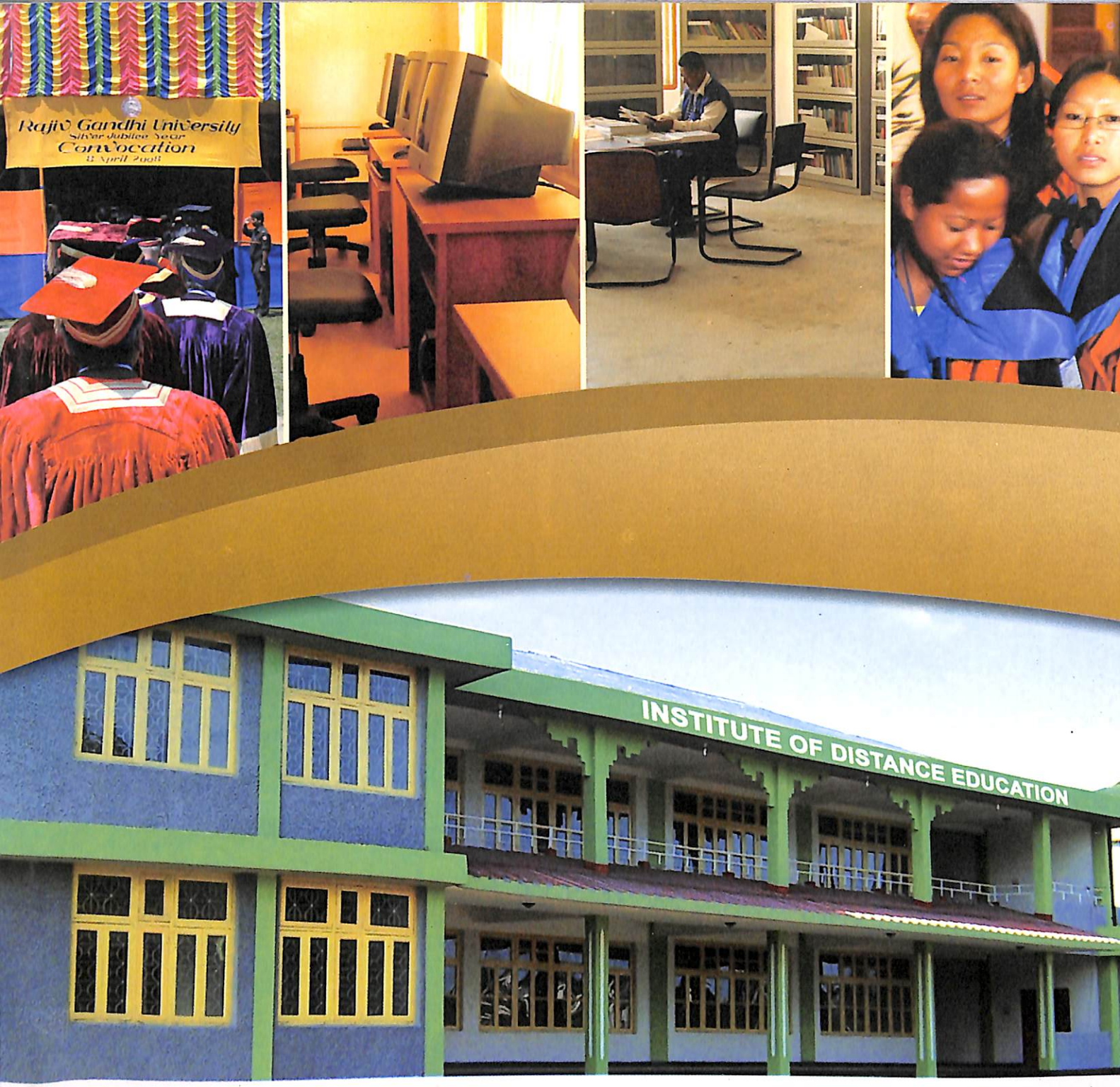


MA (Sociology)

FIRST SEMESTER

MASOC 401

INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
Rajiv Gandhi University

www.ide.rgu.ac.in

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS

MA [Sociology]

First Semester

MASOC-401

RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY
Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

BOARD OF STUDIES

1.	Prof. M Hussain Head, Department of Sociology, R.G.U.	Chairman (Ex-officio)
2.	Shri Bikash Bage Assistant Professor Department of Sociology, R.G.U.	Member
3.	Dr. S. R. Parhi Assistant Professor Department of Sociology, R.G.U.	Member
4.	S. Yadav Assistant Professor Department of Sociology, R.G.U.	Member
5.	Prof. V. Xaxa Deputy Director Tata Institute of Social Science, Guwahati	Member
6.	Prof. P. Jogdand Dept. of Sociology Mumbai University, Mumbai	Member
7.	Prof. J. Borbora Head, Department of Sociology Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam	Member

Reviewer

Dr. Soubhagya Ranjan Padhi, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh

Authors:

Dr. Arvinder A. Ansari (Units: 1.2.1, 2.3, 3.2, 3.3.4, 3.4-3.5, Unit 4, 5.2-5.3, 5.5) © Dr. Arvinder A. Ansari, 2016

Vikas Publishing House (Units: 1.0-1.1, 1.2, 1.2.2, 1.3-1.7, 2.0-2.2, 2.4-2.9, 3.0-3.1, 3.3-3.3.3, 3.6-3.10, 5.0-5.1, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7-5.11) © Reserved, 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication which is material protected by this copyright notice may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized or stored in any form or by any means now known or hereinafter invented, electronic, digital or mechanical, including photocopying, scanning, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission from the Publisher.

"Information contained in this book has been published by Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. and has been obtained by its Authors from sources believed to be reliable and are correct to the best of their knowledge. However, IDE—Rajiv Gandhi University, the publishers and its Authors shall be in no event be liable for any errors, omissions or damages arising out of use of this information and specifically disclaim any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular use"

Vikas® is the registered trademark of Vikas® Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

VIKAS® PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD
E-28, Sector-8, Noida - 201301 (UP)
Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999
Regd. Office: 7361, Ravindra Mansion, Ram Nagar, New Delhi – 110 055
• Website: www.vikaspublishing.com • Email: helpline@vikaspublishing.com

About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Classical Sociological Thinkers

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
Unit I: Development of Classical Sociology Emergence and Development of Sociology: Socio-Economic Force, Intellectual Context.	**Unit 1:** Development of Classical Sociology **(Pages 3-17)**
Unit II: Auguste Comte Law of Three Stages, Positivism, Hierarchy of Sciences.	**Unit 2:** Auguste Comte **(Pages 19-30)**
Unit III: Karl Marx Dialectical Materialism, Meterialistic Concept of History, Alienation, Theory of Class Struggle, Theory of Capitalism.	**Unit 3:** Karl Marx **(Pages 31-53)**
Unit IV: Emile Durkheim Division of Labour, Social Fact, Rules of Sociological Methods, Sociology of Religion, Theory of Suicide.	**Unit 4:** Emile Durkheim **(Pages 55-78)**
Unit V: Max Weber Rationality and Bureaucracy, Ideal Types, Social Action, Power, Authority and Legitimacy, Theory of Protestant Ethics and Theory of Capitalism, Class, Status and Party.	**Unit 5:** Max Weber **(Pages 79-106)**

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

UNIT 1 DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY 3-17

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Unit Objectives
1.2 Emergence and Development of Sociology
  1.2.1 Socio-Economic Factors
  1.2.2 Intellectual Context for Sociology
1.3 Summary
1.4 Key Terms
1.5 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
1.6 Questions and Exercises
1.7 Further Reading

UNIT 2 AUGUSTE COMTE 19-30

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 Law of Three Stages
2.3 Positivism
2.4 Hierarchy of Sciences
2.5 Summary
2.6 Key Terms
2.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.8 Questions and Exercises
2.9 Further Reading

UNIT 3 KARL MARX 31-53

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Unit Objectives
3.2 Dialectical Materialism
3.3 Materialistic Conception of History
  3.3.1 Stages of Human History
  3.3.2 Modes of Production and Practical Aspects of Historical Materialism
  3.3.3 An Assessment of Historical Materialism
  3.3.4 Alienation
3.4 Theory of Class Struggle
3.5 Theory of Capitalism
3.6 Summary
3.7 Key Terms
3.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.9 Questions and Exercises
3.10 Further Reading

UNIT 4 EMILE DURKHEIM 55-78

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Unit Objectives
4.2 Brief Biography

4.3 Division of Labour
4.4 Social Fact
4.5 Rules of Sociological Methods
4.6 Sociology of Religion
4.7 Theory of Suicide
4.8 Summary
4.9 Key Terms
4.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.11 Questions and Exercises
4.12 Further Reading

UNIT 5 MAX WEBER **79-106**

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 Rationality and Bureaucracy
5.3 Social Action
5.3.1 Ideal Types
5.4 Power, Authority and Legitimacy
5.5 Theory of Protestant Ethics and Capitalism
5.5.1 Religion and Social Change
5.5.2 Religion of China
5.5.3 Religion of India
5.6 Class, Status and Power
5.7 Summary
5.8 Key Terms
5.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.10 Questions and Exercises
5.11 Further Reading

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

In sociology, sociological perspectives, theories or paradigms are complex theoretical and methodological frameworks used to analyse and explain the objects of social study. They facilitate organizing sociological knowledge. Sociological theory is constantly evolving, and can never be presumed to be complete. New sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them, but classic sociological theories are still considered important and relevant.

Whereas the field of sociology itself and sociological theory by extension is relatively new, dating to 18th and 19th centuries, it is closely tied to a much older field of social sciences (and social theory) in general. Sociology has separated itself from the other social sciences with its focus on society, a concept that goes beyond nation, and includes communities, organizations and relationships. Sociological theory is not just a collection of answers to queries about the nature and essence of society. Not only it provides many answers, it also offers help in putting better questions and further developing research projects that can help better understand the complex social phenomena.

Like any other subject of science, it is always under development in response to the changing dynamics of our social lives as well as the increase in sociological knowledge. The adventure of sociological theory is comparatively new spanning just about two centuries. However, it is very closely connected to a long history of social thought dating back to Greek philosophers, Roman lawyers, and Jewish and Christian religious scholars. This period can be termed as the prehistory of sociological theory. Their systematic way of thinking about society laid a foundation for the sociological thought capable of understanding and expressing the emerging complexities in society.

Sociologists use empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop theories about human social activity. The goal of sociologists is to develop theories that will help explain the social world and make predictions about the future of the social world. The book *Classical Sociological Thinkers* discusses various classical and modern sociologists, their concepts of sociological evolution and the various theories they propounded.

The learning material in the book is presented in a structured format so that it is easy to grasp. Each unit begins with an Introduction followed by Unit Objectives. The detailed content is then presented in a simple language, interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to enable the student to test his/her understanding as and when he/she goes through each unit. Summary and Key Terms provided at the end of each unit help in quick recollection. Questions and Exercises are also provided for further practice.

UNIT 1 DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY

Structure

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Unit Objectives
1.2 Emergence and Development of Sociology
  1.2.1 Socio-Economic Factors
  1.2.2 Intellectual Context for Sociology
1.3 Summary
1.4 Key Terms
1.5 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
1.6 Questions and Exercises
1.7 Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sociology is the study of human society or societies. However, such a simple initial definition of the subject poses the question, 'What is human society?' There is a difference of emphasis between the singular form of a society and its plural form. 'Society', as a singular term, appears general and unlimited. The plural term, 'societies', sounds more like a set of container units distinct from each other, such that you can take them one by one to inspect their contents.

In fact, sociology has always studied societies, both taken separately and together, as 'human societies'. The balance between the two aspects may vary, but in the end, the study of one absolutely requires the study of the other. Neither of them makes sense independently. For instance, considering India as a society, one can think of it in terms of cities, factories, schools, farms or prisons. One can also think of it in terms of politics, media or divinity. It is simple to connect all these factors. They can also be visualized as confined within the boundaries of the Indian states and referred under the general heading of 'Indian society'.

The development of culture, ways of acting, thinking and feeling makes human society a special case as compared with the societies of other species. These features are transmitted from one generation to the next and across societies through learning, not through inheritance. Culture includes language and technology, both of which involve the communication of ideas and the possibility of sophisticated coordination of action. This vastly enhances adaptability.

In this unit, you will learn about the context and forces that led to the emergence and development of sociology.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Trace the emergence and development of sociology
- Identify the socio-economic forces in sociology
- Establish the intellectual context for sociology

NOTES

1.2 EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology is a relatively new academic discipline among the social sciences, which include economics, political science, anthropology, history and psychology. The ideas behind it, however, have a long history and can trace their origins to a mixture of common human knowledge and philosophy.

Sociology emerged as a scientific discipline in the early 19th century, as a fundamentally new type of society emerged based on new principles of social organization and new ideas of enlightenment. This led to a change in the mind-sets of people. Sociologists hoped not only to understand what held social groups together, but also to develop an antidote to the social breakdown. In terms of science, sociology pertains to social groups and their hierarchies or forms of organization. It combines functions which are inclined to maintain or modify these forms of organization and their inter-group network. Sociology is concerned with interaction itself. A social group is a system of social interaction.

Sociology is interested in social relationships, not because they are economic, political, religious, legal or educational, but because they are social at the same time. Further, in sociology we do not study everything that happens in a society or under social conditions, but we study culture, social relationships, their specific forms, varieties and patterns. We study the combination of relations, how they build up smaller or greater systems and how they respond to changes and changing demands or needs.

Auguste Comte introduced the term 'sociology' in the year 1839. He was a French philosopher and sociologist. Comte attempted to combine all the faculties of mankind, including history, psychology and economics. His own pattern of sociology was typical of the 19th century; he put across the theory that every man had experienced the same distinct historical stages and that the success of this progress was the solution to every social ill. He believed that sociology would lead to the further development of social sciences.

Peter Berger argued that 'sociology is a distinctive way of thinking, a particular awareness of the nature of social life, an unwillingness to accept the superficial and the apparently obvious'.

Emile Durkheim was a pioneer in demonstrating scientific methodology in sociology. In his most acclaimed work, *Rules of Sociological Method* (1897), he emphasized the methodology that he has described in his study, *Suicide* (1897).

The discipline of sociology appeared in many universities in the 1890s. Urbanization and industrialization were posing several social issues and the sociologists of those times were trying hard to find a scientific solution. However, they did not succeed. It was their strong belief that sociology was the key to the scientific growth of the society. Later, sociology emerged as a branch of scientific knowledge with theories resulting from scientific inferences, rather than mere guesswork or comments that were based on impressions.

1.2.1 Socio-Economic Factors

Social settings have a profound effect on shaping the intellectual fields. This is specifically true of sociology, which is not only derived from that setting but takes the social setting

NOTES

as its subject matter. We will briefly discuss some of the significant social conditions of the 19th century and early 20th century, which were of the supreme significance in the development of sociology.

Political Revolutions

The long series of political revolutions ushering in the French Revolution of 1789 and then carrying over through the 20th century was the immediate factor responsible for the rise of sociological theorizing. These revolutions had enormous impact on many societies resulting in many positive changes. However, what caught the awareness of many early theorists was not the positive consequences, but the negative effects of these changes. These thinkers were disturbed by the resulting chaos and disorder, especially in France. They had a common desire to reinstate the social order. Some of the more intense thinkers of the age literally wanted a return to the peaceful and comparatively orderly days of the Middle Ages. However, more sophisticated thinkers felt that social change had made such a return almost impossible. These thinkers tried to find new bases of order in societies which had been changed by the political revolutions.

French Revolution

The French revolution of 1789 in various aspects overshadowed the 19th century as a revolution which challenged and successfully dismantled the old social order. This revolution strengthened the state which aimed to represent the will of the people. Therefore, it is very crucial to recognize that the political and cultural climate which existed before the revolution was dominated by the monarchy and the church.

The abolishment of all religious order falls into Comte's theory that throughout history society has traversed through three discrete stages: theological, metaphysical and scientific. Comte believed that a country with religious order meant a theological approach that deemed the condition of society to be the God's will. The monarchy had always justified its position of power by emphasizing that the right to rule derives from God. In practice it meant that kings are answerable for their actions to God alone. By abolishing the monarchy and religious order, the revolution marked the move away from Comte's 'theological' stage.

The French citizens were provided new legal rights, a comprehensive centralized education system and a new inheritance system. These changes challenged the preceding traditional model, and hence provided to the individual citizens a different perspective of society. The study of this new perspective and the introduction of individual rights heralded the beginning of sociology as a discipline. It also confirmed the French revolution's tremendous influence on the field. Karl Marx, one of the major philosophical, economic and sociological personality of modern times, was tremendously influenced by the revolution of 1789. He expected that other similar revolutions elsewhere against feudal or oppressive societies will follow. When Marx's ideas ultimately were put into practice after the Russian revolution in October 1917, Leon Trotsky wrote an analysis of this event in terms of the French Revolution. Therefore it proves how this event still has relevance when studying social uprisings presently. There was a greater stress on the state as opposed to an established monarchy and church system. Consequently, a new social movement called 'nationalism' came into existence because some of the thinkers replaced allegiance to God and the monarchy with an allegiance to the state.

Nationalism had given rise to several uprisings since the French revolution (particularly National Socialism in Germany during the 1930's) and again gave people

NOTES

another perception of the society they are part of. It is pertinent because Nationalism is studied in depth in social scientific fields like anthropology and sociology presently.

The Industrial Revolution

Industrial Revolution was at least as important as the French revolution in the shaping of sociological theory. It swept through many Western societies, mostly in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Industrial Revolution did not involve a single event but various interrelated developments which ended up transforming the Western world from a basically agricultural to a tremendously industrial system. Huge number of people left farms and agricultural work for the industrial occupation available in the mushrooming factories. These factories themselves were transformed by a long series of technological innovations and improvements. Huge economic bureaucracies came into being to provide various services required by industry and the upcoming capitalist economic system. In this economy, a free marketplace was most appropriate wherein the various products of an industrial system could be exchanged. Within this system, a few profited greatly while the majority worked long hours for low wages. A reaction against the industrial system and against capitalism in general followed and led to the labour movement as well as various radical movements aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system.

The Industrial Revolution, capitalism and the reaction against them all involved an enormous upheaval in Western society, an upheaval that affected sociologists greatly.

The Rise of Socialism

One set of changes aimed at coping with the excesses of the industrial system and capitalism can be combined under the heading 'socialism'. Although some sociologists favoured socialism as a solution to industrial problems, most were personally and intellectually opposed to it. On the one side, Karl Marx was an active supporter of the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a socialist system. Although he did not develop a theory of socialism per se, he spent a great deal of time criticizing various aspects of capitalist society.

Most early theorists, such as Weber and Durkheim, were opposed to socialism (at least as it was envisioned by Marx). Although they recognized the problems within capitalist society, they sought social reform within capitalism rather than the social revolution argued for by Marx. They feared socialist more than they did capitalism. This fear played a far greater role in shaping sociological theory than did Marx's support of the socialist alterative to capitalism. In fact, as we will see, in many cases sociological theory developed in reaction against Marxian and, more generally, socialist theory.

Urbanization

Partly as a result of the Industrial Revolution, a large number of people in the 19th century and 20th centuries were uprooted from their rural home and moved to urban settings. This massive migration was caused, in large parts, by the jobs created by the industrial system in the urban areas. However, it presented many difficulties for those people who had to adjust to urban life. In addition, the expansion of the cities produced a seemingly endless list of urban problems—overcrowding, pollution, noise, traffic and so forth.

The first major school of American sociology, the Chicago school, was in large part defined by its concern for the city and its interest in using Chicago as a laboratory in which to study urbanization and its problems.

Religious Change

NOTES

Social change brought on by political revolutions, the Industrial Revolution and urbanization had a profound effect on religiosity. Many early sociologists came from religious backgrounds and some were professionally involved with religion to improve social lives. They brought to sociology the same objectives as they had in their religious life. For such thinkers sociology was transformed into a religion. For others, their sociological theories bore an unmistakable religious imprint. Durkheim wrote one of his major works on religion. A large portion of Weber's work also was devoted to the religions of the world. However, Marx's orientation was far more critical.

The Growth of Science

When sociological theory was being developed, there was an increasing emphasis on science in society as whole. As science was acquiring enormous prestige, those associated with most successful sciences (physics, biology and chemistry) were accorded honoured places in society. Sociologists (especially Comte and Durkheim) from the beginning were preoccupied with science, and many wanted to model sociology after the successful physical and biological sciences. However, a debate soon developed between those who wholeheartedly accepted the scientific model and those (such as Weber) who thought that distinctive characteristics of social life made a wholesale adaptation of scientific model difficult.

The Enlightenment and the Founding of Sociology in France

Many observers believe that the Enlightenment constitutes a critical development in terms of the later evolution of sociology. Reason became the God of these philosophers who were enormously inspired by the scientific achievements of the preceding centuries. Truth became the central goal of the intellectuals of this age; but not the truth founded on revelation, tradition or authority. Instead, it was the reason and observations that were to be the twin pillars of truth. The prevailing institutions were contrary to human nature and thus inhibitive of their growth and development. Unreasonable institutions prevented men from realizing their potential. Therefore, these thinkers waged constant war against the irrational and criticism became their major weapon.

They fought what they considered to be superstition, bigotry or intolerance; they struggled against censorship and demanded freedom of thought; they attacked the prerogatives of the feudal classes and their restraints upon the industrial and commercial classes; and finally, they tried to secularize ethics. They were very knowledgeable about the positive intellectual achievements up to their time, but they were also critical, sceptical and secular. Basically, it was their faith in reason and science which provided so strong an impetus to their work and led them to become humanitarian, optimistic and confident.

The 18th-century thinkers had lost faith in the closed and self-sufficient metaphysical systems of the preceding century; they had lost patience with a philosophy confined to definite immutable axioms and deductions from them.

Investigations and inquiries are emphasized. Enlightenment thought is not merely reflective, nor is it satisfied to deal solely with axiomatic truths. It attributes to thought a creative and critical function. Philosophy is no longer merely a matter of abstract thinking; it acquires the practical function of criticizing existing institutions to show that they are unreasonable and unnatural. It demands that these institutions and the entire old order be replaced by a new one that is more reasonable, natural and hence necessary.

NOTES

And the fulfilment of the new order is the demonstration of this truth. Enlightenment thinking, then, has a negative and critical as well as a positive side. It is not so much the particular doctrines, axioms and theorems which lend it a new and original quality; rather, it is the process of criticizing, doubting and tearing down as well as building up. The unity of the 'negative' and 'positive' tendencies is eventually split and after the French revolutions they manifest themselves as separate and conflicting philosophical principles.

The Mind of the Enlightenment

For the enlightenment thinkers, all aspects of an individual's life and works were subject to critical examination—various types of sciences, religious revelation, metaphysics, aesthetics, etc. These thinkers felt and sensed the mighty forces impelling them along, but they refused to abandon themselves to these forces.

Self-examination, understanding of their own activity, their own society and their own time was an essential function of thought. By knowing, understanding and recognizing the main forces and tendencies of their epoch, individuals could determine the direction and control the consequences of these forces. Through reason and science man could attain ever greater degrees of freedom and, therefore, ever greater degrees of perfection. Intellectual progress, an idea that permeated the thinking of that age, was to serve constantly to further man's general progress.

They turned not to Descartes but primarily to Newton, whose method was not pure deduction but analysis. Newton was interested in 'facts' and the data of experience. His principles, the goal of his investigation, rested to a significant degree on experience and observation, i.e., the empirical basis.

Newton's research was based on the assumption of universal order and law in the material world. Facts are not a chaotic, haphazard jumble of separate elements; quite to the contrary, they appear to fall into patterns and exhibit definite forms, regularities and relationships. Newton believed that order is imminent in the universe and is discovered not by abstract principles but by observation and compilation of data. This is the methodology most characteristic of 18th-century thought, and it is this emphasis which distinguishes it from that of the 17th-century Continental philosophers.

Condillac, for example, in his *Treatise on Systems* (basing himself on Locke), explicitly justifies this methodology and criticizes the great systems of the 17th century for having failed to adhere to it. Facts, the phenomena of the real world, were, for all practical purposes, ignored by the 17th century rationalists. Single ideas and concepts were elevated to the status of dogma.

The rational spirit dominated knowledge completely. Thus Condillac argues the necessity for a new method which unites the 'positive' and scientific as well as the rational. One must study the phenomena themselves if their immanent forms and connection are to be known. Condillac, D'Alembert and others now call for this new method as a prerequisite to intellectual progress.

By observing the actual practice of science, the synthesis of the 'positive' and the 'rational' was not an unattainable ideal but the one fully realizable. The natural sciences were proving themselves; their progress could be clearly perceived as the result of the triumphant march of the new scientific method. In the course of a century and a half, science had made a number of significant advances and then with Newton a truly qualitative step forward: the complex multiplicity of natural phenomena was reduced to, and comprehended as, the workings of a single universal law. This was an impressive victory for the new method.

NOTES

Newton's general law of attraction was not the exclusive result of theorizing nor of sporadic experimentation or observation unguided by theory; its discovery was the fruit of the rigorous application of the scientific method.

Newton completed what others had begun. Newton retained, used and substantiated the method employed before him by Kepler and Galileo, the main feature of which was the interdependence of its analytical and synthetic aspects. Here was a magnificent triumph of reason and observation—the new method which takes observed facts and advances an interpretation which accounts for what is observed, so that if the interpretation is correct it can guide observer in their quest for new facts.

What is new and original about Enlightenment thought, therefore, is the whole-hearted adoption of the methodological pattern of Newton's physics. What is even more important for our consideration of the philosophical foundations of sociological theory is the fact that immediately with its adoption it was generalized and employed in realms other than the mathematical and physical ones. It became an indispensable tool in the study of all phenomena. Here again this may be contrasted with the 17th-century rationalist understanding of the term 'reason'. For Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, to select the most typical thinkers of that period, reason was the realm of 'eternal verities'—truth held in common by individuals and God.

Reason bows neither to the merely factual, the simple data of experience; nor to the 'evidence' of revelation, tradition or authority. Reason together with observation is a facility for the acquisition of truth. The change did indeed become increasingly manifest. An analysis was now applied to psychological and even sociological phenomena and problems. In these realms too it had become clear that reason is a powerful instrument when employed in that special method—analysis into separate elements as well as synthetic reconstruction.

It should be clear, then, why the Enlightenment is a most logical point of departure if one is interested in the origins of sociological theory. It is in that period that one may see more consistently than before the emergence of the scientific method. Reason in itself will not yield knowledge of reality; neither observation and nor experimentation alone yield such knowledge.

Knowledge of reality, whether natural or social, depends on the unity of reason and observation in the scientific method. The enlightenment thinkers were as interested in society and history as they were in nature, and these were treated as an indivisible unity. By studying nature—including the nature of man—one could learn not only about what is, but about what is possible.

Likewise, by studying society and history one could learn not only about the workings of the existing factual order, but about its inherent possibilities as well. These thinkers were 'negative' in that they were always critical of the existing order which, in their view, stifled an individual's potential and did not allow the 'possible' to emerge from the 'is'. The existing factual order was studied scientifically by these thinkers in order to learn how to transcend it.

Conservative Reaction to the Enlightenment

The theorist who was most directly and positively influenced by Enlightenment thinking was Karl Marx, but he formed his early theoretical ideas in Germany. On the surface, we might think that French classical sociological theory, like Marx's theory, was directly and positively influenced by the Enlightenment. 'The ideology of the counter-Enlightenment

NOTES

represented a virtual inversion of Enlightenment liberalism. In place of modernist premises, we can detect in the Enlightenment critics a strong antimodernist sentiment.'

The most extreme form of opposition to Enlightenment ideas was French Catholic counter-revolutionary philosophy, as represented by the ideas of Louis De Bonald (1754–1840) and Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821). These men were reacting against not only the Enlightenment but also the French Revolution, which they saw partly as a product of the kind of thinking characteristic of the Enlightenment. De Bonald, for example, was disturbed by the revolutionary changes and yearned for a return to the peace and harmony of the Middle Ages. In this view, God was the source of society; therefore, reason, which was so important to the Enlightenment philosophers, was seen as inferior to traditional religious beliefs. Furthermost, it was believed that because God had created society, people should not tamper with it and should not try to change a holy creation.

The conservative turned away from what they considered to be the 'naïve' nationalism of the Enlightenment. They not only recognized the irrational aspects of social life but also assigned them positive value. Thus they regarded such phenomena as tradition, imagination, emotionalism and religion as useful and necessary components of deplored developments such as French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, which they saw as descriptive forces. The conservatives tended to emphasize social order, an emphasis that became one of the central themes of the work of several sociological thinkers.

1.2.2 Intellectual Context for Sociology

According to Morris Ginsberg, the scope of sociology includes a broad study of human interactions, their conditions and consequences. Some writers would restrict its scope to the relations arising out of acts of will, but this is an unjustifiable and unworkable limitation. Many interactions between individuals are not consciously determined or apprehended. One of the most interesting problems confronting the student of sociology is to determine the respective roles of reason or rational purpose and of impulse and the unconsciousness in social life. In this case, sociology must be capable of dealing with the complete issue or network of social relationships. Since these relationships are assumed to be dependent on the nature of individuals; (i) to one another, (ii) to the community, (iii) to the external environment. This can be explained if every social event can be traced back to its origin, as influenced by complex interactions. A combination of these interactions is comprised within a community, with respect to external influences. But this ideal, if generously conceived, is clearly too ambitious.

Sociology involves a systematic and objective study of human society. Sociologists study individuals' social actions. Social relationships, for instance, those between a husband and a wife, a teacher and a student, a buyer and a seller and social processes, namely, cooperation, competition, conflict and organizations, communities and nations and social structures (family, class and state), give rise to sociological queries. Explanations that are derived from norms and values result in the formation of social institutions. Thus, sociology can be defined as the study of social life. Sociology comprises a variety of apprehensions and interests. It is aimed at providing classified forms of relationships within societies, institutions and associations. These relationships pertain to the economic, political, moral, religious and social aspects of human life. Though, so far no collective agreement has been reached on the essence of sociology, yet it is established that sociology deals with the study of interaction systems, which shape social institutions, the state and

Check Your Progress

1. Who introduced the term 'sociology' and when?
2. How did the French Revolution help French citizens?
3. What were the views of Weber and Durkheim regarding socialism as an alternative to capitalism?
4. What was the key to the period of Enlightenment?

NOTES

the non-native order. Therefore, in sociology we study about social organization, social structure, institutions and culture.

Sociology was defined differently by two schools of thought, pertaining to its range and theme:

(i) Formal school
(ii) Synthetic school

Formal School

The formal school defined sociology as a social science that has definite characteristics. This school was advocated by German sociologists, George Simmel, Ferdinand Tonnies, Alfred Vierkandt and Leopord Von Wiese. On the other hand, the synthetic school with French sociologist Durkheim, British politician and sociologist Leonard T. Hobhouse and Russian-American Pitirim Alexandrovich Sorokin attempted to bring together a type of coordination among all social sciences. The formal school supported the idea of giving sociology a suitable subject matter to make it a distinct discipline. It stressed on the study of the forms of social relationships and considered sociology as independent.

Simmel defined sociology as a specific social science that describes, organizes, analyses and visually explains the forms of social relationships. To put it in a different way, social interactions should be classified into various forms or types and analysed. Simmel argued that social interactions have various forms. He conducted researches on formal relationships like cooperation, competition, sub and super-ordinate relationships, etc. He said, 'However diverse the interests are that give rise to these sociations, the forms in which the interests are realized may yet be identical.' His main emphasis was to conceptualize these forms from human relationships which are not affected by different scenarios. Vierkandt believed that sociology should pertain to people being extremely attached mentally or psychically. Von Wiese believed in the existence of two types of basic social processes in human society:

(i) Associative processes that are related to contact, approach, adaptation, etc.
(ii) Disassociate processes like competition and conflict.

Additionally, a blend of associative and dissociative processes also exists. Each of these processes can be further segregated into subclasses. These subclasses result in 650 categories of human relationships. Sociology should concentrate on discovering a basic force of change and consistency and should be influenced by the history of concrete societies. Tonnies suggested two types of societies, namely *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (association). These were based on the level of closeness between members of the society. Based on the types of relationships, he attempted to differ between community and society.

Max Weber outlined a particular field for sociology. He recommended that the aim of sociology was to identify or explain social behaviour. But social behaviour does cover all aspects of human relations, since all exchanges between human beings cannot be called social. Sociology deals with learning and identifying the different types of social relationships.

Criticism of Formal School

The formal school has come under criticism because it has focussed only on abstract forms and ignored the more feasible parts of social life. It is not possible to study abstract forms that have been alienated from concrete relations.

According to Ginsberg, the study of social relationships would never be complete if it is carried out in isolation, without a thorough knowledge of the terms that are associated with it. Sociology is not the only branch of social sciences that focusses on the types of social relationships. Political science and international law also study the same. Since it is not possible to study social sciences as a separate entity from other sciences, the concept of pure sociology is not practical.

Synthetic School of Sociology

The synthetic school defines sociology as a combination of social sciences. It stresses on widening the range of sociology. Durkheim divided sociology into three main sections—social morphology, social physiology and general sociology. Social morphology pertains to the lifestyle of people on the basis of their location or region. It comprises factors like population, density, distribution, etc. One can further divide this into two categories, (i) analysis of density and type of population that influences social relationships and social groups and (ii) learning about social hierarchy or details related to the main categories of social groups and institutions, along with their operation. Social physiology deals with the origin and character of different social institutions, namely religion, morals, law, economic institutions, etc.

The prime objective of general sociology is to frame general social laws. Efforts are still on to find out links between different types of institutions that are treated independently in social physiology and the possibilities of emergence of general social laws as a by-product. Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse, a British sociologist, defined sociology as a field of science which focusses on the whole social life of man. It relates to other social sciences in a way that can be regarded as a blend of mutual exchange and stimulation. Karl Mannheim has explained sociology in terms of two key divisions, systematic and general sociology and historical sociology.

- **Systematic sociology:** This provides a methodical review of the main factors of coexistence, such that they are evident in every kind of society.
- **Historical sociology:** This deals with the historical array and existence of general forms of the society.

This can be divided into two sectors, comparative sociology and social dynamics. Comparative sociology basically deals with identical historical changes and tries to highlight the general features by comparing them. It also separates the general features from the industrial features. Social dynamics is concerned with the interrelations that exist among different social factors and institutions in a given society, for example, in an ancient society.

Ginsberg combined the main features of sociology in a way that they classified the different types and structures of social relations, specifically those that are clearly specified as institutions and associations. He tried to find connectivity between various parameters of social life, for example, economic, political, moral and legal, intellectual and social elements. It attempts to make the basic conditions of social change and persistence simpler and evaluates the sociological principles that influence social life.

Thus, on the basis of the viewpoints of many sociologists, the scope of sociology can be generally defined. To begin with, sociology should be concerned with the analysis of various institutions, associations and social groups, which have resulted from social relationships of individuals. The second step is an understanding of the different links between various sections of the society. This objective is catered to by the functionalist school of sociology, as required. The Marxist school also exhibits the same opinion. Thus, the main area of discussion of sociology pertains to social structure. Sociology

should also focus on aspects which are important in bringing about social stability and social change. Finally, sociology should also tackle issues related to the changes in pattern and the consequences of societal changes.

Sociology has emerged as a distinct intellectual endeavour with the development of modern societies and the study of such societies is its principal concern. However, sociologists are also preoccupied with a broad range of issues about the nature of social interaction and human societies in general. Sociology also enables us to see the world from others' perspective rather than our own. French philosopher Auguste Comte and English philosopher Herbert Spencer were pioneers among sociologists. Their concerns were with the means and paths of societal development and the conditions for harmony and continued development. They presented quite different views on these issues and a comparison of their work set the stage for discussion by the three famous personalities, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

Emile Durkheim stressed on the practical existence of a society. He emphasized on social realities and saw sociology from a different point of view, as compared to that of psychology. Social realities restrict the freedom of members of the society to act, think and feel differently, with respect to the society. Beliefs and moral codes are transferred from one generation to the next and are imbibed by the individuals who form a society. One way of explaining social realities involves focussing on the cause of a social reality to explain its origin. The decisive cause of a social reality should be looked for among the facts that precede it. It should not depend on an individual's level of consciousness. Nevertheless, this social reality can be explained in a better way after a detailed study of its functions in the society, its role in contributing to the general needs of the social beings and its utility in establishing a social order. Durkheim believed that this social reality survived because it was useful to the society.

Sociology differed from most of the natural sciences in dealing with a phenomenon, which was often difficult and sometimes impossible to measure or calculate, or to subsume under relations of causality. However, this did not involve a total divergence in the methods of inquiry. It involved considering the limits of sociological enquiry and assessing what can be practically achieved. In sociology, five important methods or approaches can be distinguished, which are as follows:

(i) **The historical method:** This method has taken two principal forms. The first is that of early sociologists, influenced by the philosophy of history and afterwards by the biological theory of evolution. This approach involves a certain order of priorities in the problems for research and theory. It concentrates on problems of the origin of development and transformation of social institutions, societies and civilization. It is concerned with the whole span of human history and with all major institutions of society, as in the work of Comte, Spencer, etc. In Marx's view, the most important thing about people is their practical activity. The way people produce for themselves, gives shape to other aspects of their society and culture. In this way, they relate to nature and to one another in society. These are the most fundamental sets of relations. These sets of relations change and develop over the course of history. They change from one 'mode of production' to another.

(ii) **The comparative method:** This was considered to be the fundamental method in sociology for a long time. It was first used by evolutionary sociologists, but its use did not involve a necessary commitment to an evolutionary approach. Durkheim, in the *Rules of Sociological Method*,

explains the significance of the method. After claiming that sociological explanation consists entirely of the establishment of causal connections, he observes that the only way to demonstrate that one phenomenon is the cause of another is to examine cases in which the two phenomena are simultaneously present or absent and establish whether one does depend on the other, or not. In many natural sciences the establishment of causal connections is facilitated by experiment, but since experiment is impossible in sociology, Durkheim suggests the use of the method of indirect experiment, i.e., the comparative method.

(iii) **The functionalist method:** In sociology, this method first emerged in the form of a response against the approach and assertions of evolutionists. It criticized the immature and outward application of the comparative method and the methods of 'conjectural history'.

These methods used data that was neither verified nor systematic, on ancient societies, for the reconstruction of early stages of human social life. The functionalist method also criticized the objective or claim made by evolutionists to present the complete social history of mankind in scientific terms. The notion of social function was formulated by Herbert Spencer in the 19th century. Durkheim defined the function of a social institution as the correspondence between it and the needs of social organism.

(iv) **The formal or systematic method:** Formal or systematic sociology represented a reaction against the evolutionary and encyclopaedic science of early sociologists. Its originator was George Simmel and it remained largely a German approach to sociology. Simmel argued that sociology is a new method, a new way of looking at facts which are already treated by other social sciences. According to him, this new approach consists of considering the 'forms' of sociation or interaction, as distinguished from the historical content. Sociology is therefore also concerned with forms of interaction which have not been studied at all by traditional social sciences. These forms appear not in major institutions, such as the state, the economic system and so on, but in minor and fleeting relationships between individuals.

(v) **The structural method:** The French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss proposed the structural method in the 1950s. According to Edmund Leach, 'Levi-Strauss has provided us with a new set of hypotheses about familiar material. We can look again at what we thought was understood and begin to gain entirely new insights'. According to the structural method, meaning is produced and reproduced within a culture through various practices, phenomena and activities that serve as systems of signification. The structuralist method analyses activities that are as different as food-preparation and serving rituals, religious rites, games, literary and non-literary texts, and so on, to determine the deep structures by which meaning is produced and reproduced within the culture. Lévi-Strauss examined cultural phenomena including mythology, kinship, and food preparation. In addition to these examinations, Lévi-Strauss produced more linguistically focused writings in which he applied the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's difference between langue and parole in his search for the fundamental structures of the human mind, arguing that the structures that form the 'deep grammar' of society are found in the human mind and function in individuals unconsciously.

Check Your Progress

5. How was sociology defined by two schools of thought, pertaining to its range and theme?
6. How did Simmel define sociology?
7. What were the three divisions of sociology according to Durkheim?
8. What is comparative sociology?

1.3 SUMMARY

- Sociology is a relatively new academic discipline among the social sciences, which include economics, political science, anthropology, history and psychology. The ideas behind it, however, have a long history and can trace their origins to a mixture of common human knowledge and philosophy.
- Sociology is interested in social relationships, not because they are economic, political, religious, legal or educational, but because they are social at the same time.
- Social settings have a profound effect on shaping the intellectual fields. This is specifically true of sociology, which is not only derived from that setting but takes the social setting as its subject matter.
- The long series of political revolutions ushering in the French Revolution of 1789 and then carrying over through the 20th century was the immediate factor responsible for the rise of sociological theorizing. These revolutions had enormous impact on many societies resulting in many positive changes.
- The abolishment of all religious order falls into Comte's theory that throughout history society has traversed through three discrete stages: theological, metaphysical and scientific. Comte believed that a country with religious order meant a theological approach that deemed the condition of society to be the God's will.
- Industrial Revolution was at least as important as the French revolution in the shaping of sociological theory. It swept through many Western societies, mostly in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Industrial Revolution did not involve a single event but various interrelated developments which ended up transforming the Western world from a basically agricultural to a tremendously industrial system.
- One set of changes aimed at coping with the excesses of the industrial system and capitalism can be combined under the heading 'socialism'. Although some sociologists favoured socialism as a solution to industrial problems, most were personally and intellectually opposed to it.
- When sociological theory was being developed, there was an increasing emphasis on science in society as whole. As science was acquiring enormous prestige, those associated with most successful sciences (physics, biology and chemistry) were accorded honoured places in society.
- The synthetic school defines sociology as a combination of social sciences. It stresses on widening the range of sociology. Durkheim divided sociology into three main sections—social morphology, social physiology and general sociology.

1.4 KEY TERMS

- **Society**: A society can be best explained as a web of social relationships. It can also be said that a society is a group of people with common territory, interaction, and culture.
- **Urbanization**: It is a population shift from rural to urban areas, "the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas", and the ways in which each society adapts to the change.

- **Industrial Revolution:** The Industrial Revolution was the transition to new manufacturing processes in the period from about 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840.
- **Socialism**: Socialism is a social and economic system characterised by social ownership of the means of production and co-operative management of the economy, as well as a political theory and movement that aims at the establishment of such a system.
- **Systematic sociology**: This provides a methodical review of the main factors of coexistence, such that they are evident in every kind of society.
- **Historical sociology**: This deals with the historical array and existence of general forms of the society.

1.5 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Auguste Comte introduced the term 'sociology' in the year 1839. He was a French philosopher and sociologist.
2. The French citizens were provided new legal rights, a comprehensive centralized education system and a new inheritance system. These changes challenged the preceding traditional model, and hence provided to the individual citizens a different perspective of society.
3. Most early theorists, such as Weber and Durkheim, were opposed to socialism (at least as it was envisioned by Marx). Although they recognized the problems within capitalist society, they sought social reform within capitalism rather than the social revolution argued for by Marx.
4. Reason became the God of the philosophers who were enormously inspired by the scientific achievements of the preceding centuries. Truth became the central goal of the intellectuals of this age; but not the truth founded on revelation, tradition or authority. Instead, it was the reason and observations that were to be the twin pillars of truth.
5. Sociology was defined differently by two schools of thought, pertaining to its range and theme:
   (i) Formal school
   (ii) Synthetic school
6. Simmel defined sociology as a specific social science that describes, organizes, analyses and visually explains the forms of social relationships.
7. Durkheim divided sociology into three main sections—social morphology, social physiology and general sociology.
8. Comparative sociology basically deals with identical historical changes and tries to highlight the general features by comparing them. It also separates the general features from the industrial features.

1.6 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. When did sociology emerge as a science and how?
2. What is the main focus of sociology?
3. What are the principles of the functionalist method?
4. How did Enlightenment contribute to the growth of society and its study?
5. What was the conservative response to Enlightenment?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the formal school of sociology and its criticism among sociological thinkers.
2. How did the Industrial Revolution take place and what was its significance to sociology?
3. Discuss the mind of the Enlightenment.

1.7 FURTHER READING

Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.

Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Boguardus, Emory S. 1969. *The Development of Social Theory*. Mumbai: Vakils, Feffa and Simons.

Jayapalan, J. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Ritzer, George. 1988. *Sociological Theory*, Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ritzer, George. 2007. *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Adams, Bert N., Rosalind Ann Sydie and R.A. Sydie. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Allan, Kenneth and Kenneth D. Allan. 2009. *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Calhoun, Craig J. 2002. *Classical Sociological Theory*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Edles, Laura and Desfor Scott Appelrouth. 2010. *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era: Text and Readings*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. 2007. *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. New York: Springer.

UNIT 2 AUGUSTE COMTE

NOTES

Structure

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 Law of Three Stages
2.3 Positivism
2.4 Hierarchy of Sciences
2.5 Summary
2.6 Key Terms
2.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.8 Questions and Exercises
2.9 Further Reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Comte, a stable social order rested on a consistent form of thought. He saw his own thought as leading to the establishment of a more stable, industrial order. He saw this relationship between thought and practice as a natural, rather than a causal one and saw thought as evolving naturally towards the kind of philosophy which he was formulating and recommending. Ways of thinking, of philosophizing, of knowing the world, were, in his view, primary, both in the history of humankind and in his own practice. In other words, Comte believed that people acted in such a way as to correspond with the way they thought. In different societies or periods of history, furthermore, a person's way of thinking, of knowing their world, was responsible for producing the kind of society in which they lived.

In this unit, you will learn about the sociological theories propounded by Auguste Comte.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the law of three stages as propounded by Comte
- Discuss positivism as explained by Comte
- Examine hierarchy of sciences as given by Comte

2.2 LAW OF THREE STAGES

Auguste Comte was born in France in 1798 during the height of the French Revolution, a period of chaos and unrest. His parents were devout Catholics and ardent royalists. Comte was a brilliant student excelling in physics and math with an unusual memory. His early career was poorly organized and a rather self-destructive affair in which he proceeded to 'shoot himself in the foot' several times. Along with fourteen others he was expelled from school after a student uprising over a geometry instructor, thus dashing hopes of an otherwise promising academic career.

NOTES

He did, nonetheless, manage to become secretary to Henri St. Simon, another prominent thinker with whom Comte shared many ideas. He met and married a nineteen-year-old prostitute but had an unhappy married life. He had a falling out with St. Simon and organized on his own a subscription series of lectures on the 'Positive Philosophy'.

Comte attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Seine and was rescued by a passer-by. Comte interpreted this Samaritan act as a sign that his mission in life was to complete and disseminate his positive philosophy.

In 1829, Comte completed the series of lectures, and between 1830 and 1842, published his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* in six volumes. In 1832, he managed to achieve a minor appointment at the Ecole Polytechnic, but, in 1844, he wrote a scathing attack on St. Simon and the Ecole and was dismissed. During the same year, two other important events also occurred. Comte obtained a small stipend from the English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who had been impressed by his *Positive Philosophy*, and he also began an affair with Madame Clotilde de Vaux. In 1846, she died in his arms and Comte was later to credit her with teaching him about the affective tendencies of human nature, a consideration which was to inform his suggestion for a 'religion of humanity'.

In fact, Comte was to see this religion of humanity as part of the practical application of his philosophy as recommended in his works—*The System of Positive Polity or Treatise of Sociology: Instituting the Religion of Humanity*. *Positive Philosophy* was the work in which he outlined his preferred way of knowing the world, and the *Positive Polity* contained his ideas about how to improve society, and how to establish what was, in his view, the best society possible by applying this knowledge.

According to Comte, sociology is a social, organic science. Sociology is a relatively new, evolving science dependent upon all the foregoing theories in science. However, it is quite clear that sociology is gradually moving towards the goal of a *definite* science. Comte had a very wide conception of sociology. According to him, all other social sciences are subsumed under it. He believed in a unified integral study of all social sciences taken together. He posited that the subject matter of sociology is society. It studies the structure of the society and the set of rules governing its functions.

Since sociology tries to explore the principles which help society to stay integrated and in order, it is essential that the law of sociology should be scientific. In order to make the societal laws scientific, they should pass through the full circle of making of scientific laws, namely *observation*, *experimentation*, *comparison* and *classification*. What needs to be emphasized here is the fact that in making these societal laws, use of full scientific technique is necessary.

Comte maintained that the positive science of society called sociology must pursue the method which was followed by definite sciences like astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology. He insisted that the new science must be *positive*. Positive means pursuing scientific methods of analysis and prognosis. The method of sociology includes observation as well as experimentation. Observation must be guided by a theory of social phenomena. Experimentation is controlled observation.

In sociology, experimentation involves the study of pathological cases. According to him, central to sociology is the comparison of different co-existing states of human society on the various parts of the earth's surface. By this method, he argued, the different stages of evolution may be allowed once. These conventional methods of science, like observation, experimentation and comparison, must be used in combination with the historical method.

NOTES

The law of human progress or the law of three stages, as it is alternatively known, is Comte's one of the most important central ideas. He proposed that the evolution of the human mind is parallel to the evolution of any individual mind. The development of the individual human organism is termed as ontogeny. This forms the basis for the development of phylogeny or the development of the human race. In our childhood, we all believed in imaginary worlds; when we become adults, we start accepting the world with its vices and virtues. Mankind has also undertaken quite a similar journey; from believing in the make-believe to the maturity of adulthood.

According to Comte:

> Each of our leading conceptions—each branch of our knowledge passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological or fictitious; Metaphysical or abstract; and the Scientific or positive. In theological state, human mind, seeking the essential nature of beings, the first and final causes (the origin of purpose) of all effects supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings. In Metaphysical state the mind supposes abstract forces, veritable entities (that is personified abstractions) capable of producing all phenomena. In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin of destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws, that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance.

Theological or Fictitious State

According to Comteian proposition, all theoretical conceptions, whether general or special, bear a supernatural influence. This kind of thinking is found among the primitive people and sometimes the thinking of children. At this state, there is substantial lack of logical and orderly thinking. However, Comte argues that the primitive man as well as children do have scientific outlook also. Owing to theological state of their minds, their understanding is characterized by an unscientific outlook.

The main subject matter of the theological state is natural events. The unusual and unintelligible events of nature tend man towards theological or fictitious interpretation of events. Unable to discover the natural causes of various happenings, the primitive man attributed them to imaginary or divine force. The explanation of natural events in non-natural, divine or imaginary conditions is known as theological or fictitious state. The theological state implies belief in the other world wherein reside divine forces which control the events in this world. It is clear that theological state implies a belief in divine and extra-terrestrial forces. Comte has classified the theological state further in three stages:

- ***Fetishism*:** The first and primary stage in the theological state is that of *fetishism*. Fetishism is a belief that there is some living spirit in non-living objects. This is also known as *animism*. The concept of animism signifies that the inanimate objects are not dead but are possessed by living spirits. One can argue that in India, particularly rural and tribal areas, there is a widespread belief that some deities reside in tree, stones and mountains. Therefore it has been seen that people engage in the worship of a particular tree, or a mountain.
- ***Polytheism*:** With the gradual development in human thinking, there occurred a chance in the form of thinking. *Polytheism* is the next stage to fetishism. In this stage, man had classified god and every natural force had a presiding deity. Each god had some definite function and his scope and area of action was determined.

NOTES

- ***Monotheism*:** The last and most developed form of theological state is seen manifested in *monotheism*. As the very term monotheism implies, at this level of human thinking a belief in one god had replaced the earlier belief in many gods. The monotheistic thinking symbolizes the victory of human intellect and reason over non-intellectual and irrational thinking. In monotheism, it is believed that one God is supreme and that he is responsible for the maintenance of order and system in the world.

Metaphysical or Abstract State

The metaphysical or abstract thinking marks the second stage in the evolution of human mind. According to Comte, each successive stage is an improvement upon the earlier stage. With the gradual improvement in human mind, human problems also become more intricate. The theological state was not adequate to tackle these improvements efficiently. The appearance of conflicting and opposite forces in the world presented problems which could not be successfully tackled by monotheism. It was difficult to believe that the same god was responsible for prehistoric creation as well as destruction. A single god could not account for simultaneous creation and destruction. In order to resolve this intellectual query, metaphysical thinking was developed. Under metaphysical thinking, people believe that an abstract power or force guides and determines the events in the world. Metaphysical mind disregards belief in the presence of several gods.

Scientific or Positive State

This state is the most advance and developed form of the human mind. All metaphysical knowledge is based upon speculation and is at best inferential knowledge. There are no direct means to confirm the findings of metaphysical knowledge; it is purely a matter of belief or temperament. The modern temperament of man is such that it cannot remain satisfied with mere guesswork; it craves positive knowledge which can be scientifically confirmed. The positive and scientific knowledge is based upon facts, and these facts are gathered by observation and experience. The observation and classification of facts are the beginning of scientific knowledge. From these facts we generalize and draw conclusions. These conclusions, in turn, are subjected to verification. Once verified, these become established laws, which can be relied upon in gathering and classifying the facts.

Scientific thinking is thoroughly rational and in it there is no place for any belief or superstition. According to Comte, the human mind before reaching the state of positivism, must have passed through the two earlier stages of theological and metaphysical states.

The three stages suggested by Comte have a strong idealistic basis. Yet he correlated every stage of evolution of the human mind with social organizations present in that period. The theological stage that corresponds roughly with the ancient age is dominated by the rule of the army and priests. In the metaphysical state, society was dominated by clergy and lawyers. This state roughly falls during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The modern era marks the beginning of the positive state and is generally ruled by industrialists and scientific moral guides. In the first state, the family takes centre stage, while in the second, the State rises to prominence. In the third state, however, the entire civilization has become an operative social unit.

According to Comte, sociology is a wide discipline. In order to study the discipline, he divided it into two parts. These are: social statics and social dynamics.

NOTES

1. **Social statics:** Social statics is concerned with the present structure of the society. It studies the current laws, rules and present condition of the society.
2. **Social dynamics:** Social dynamics observed as to how the present social laws are affecting the society. It also evaluates the social structure. Social dynamics also studies the correlation between various social facts. Social statis is the distinction between two aspects of theory and not between two classes of facts.

The distinction between social statics and dynamics is not between two classes of facts but between two aspects of theory. These are akin to order and progress. Order helps maintain peace and harmony across a community while progress is the social development. Thus, these four aspects, *statis*, *dynamics*, *order* and *progress* are related to each other. Social statics analyses social structure at a given moment. This helps in the understanding of the nature of social order.

On the other hand, social dynamics describes the successive and necessary stages in the development of mind and society. Social dynamics is a science which discovers the laws and principles underlying social change and progress. It also tries to find out the conditions necessary to maintain the continuity of social progress. We have to study the rule and principle of social change in a historical perspective. Comte maintained that the laws of actions and reactions of the various sub-parts of a social system are analysed by a statical study of sociology. Statics also studies the fundamental laws of progress that influence and modify social growth. It studies the relations between the constituent elements of a social infrastructure. There must always be a 'spontaneous harmony between the whole and the parts of the social system'. While analysing the component of the social system, Comte did not focus on *individuals* as elementary parts. He argues that science discourages us to take society as constituting of individuals. Instead, we need to treat family as the smallest unit, or at the most, a couple that forms the foundation of a society.

Thus, families gradually grow to become clans or tribes and then tribes grow into nation-states. Family is thus the basis of all other human associations, for these evolved from family and kinship groups. He also argues that the classes and castes which form the basic tissues of the social systems, cities and towns are the integral organs. Comte maintained that the law of three stages and progress theories constitute social dynamics. While the laws of coexistence in a society are examined by social statics, the rules of succession are studied by social dynamics. The two combine to fulfil the needs of study of the modern society. He assigned prime importance to religion and language as serving as the vessels wherein the culture, nature and thoughts of our ancestors are held. As we participate in the linguistic universe, we are part of a linguistic community. We relate to each other as we understand each other's language; without this collective tool, maintaining a social order is completely impossible.

In addition to a common language, a common religion is also essential to stabilize a social order. Religion permits men to love their fellow men and to overcome their egos. It is a strong bond that holds a society together in a common cult and common system of beliefs. Religion is the base of social order. The third factor that binds men is the division of labour.

According to Comte, men who share the same type of labour, form a fraternity. The extent of this division of labour leads to social complexities and complications. The system of division of labour bonded people together as they were dependent on others for the completion of their work. On the other hand, this same system promoted and

NOTES

nurtured the growth of capitalism and materialism. Social institutions like religion, language and division of labour, according to Comte, are not important in their own accord; rather, the contributions of these institutions in furtherance of social development are more important for sociologists. The parts and the whole of a social system need to be connected harmoniously. Political institutions, social manners, laws and rules need to be consolidated in order to develop humanity.

2.3 POSITIVISM

Comte saw a 'deplorable state of anarchy' in his time, and he believed that his 'social physics', bearing directly upon the 'principal needs and grievances of society would help bring order out of chaos'. He hoped to call this science to the attention of statesmen who profess to devote themselves to the task of resolving the alarming revolutionary constitution of modern societies. Social and moral anarchy are the result of intellectual anarchy, itself a consequence of the fact that, on the one hand, theological metaphysical philosophy has declined and, on the other, positive philosophy has not yet reached the point where it can provide an intellectual basis for a new organization and thus deliver society from the peril of dissolution. Order and progress, which the ancients thought irreconcilable, must be united once and for all. Comte considered it the great misfortune of his time that the two principles were regarded as contradictory and were represented by opposing political parties.

What he called the retrograde party was for order while the anarchical party was for progress. The principle of order was derived from the catholic-feudal, or theological, state of social philosophy, whose exponents were Ronald, Maistre, et al. The principle of progress, on the other hand, was derived from the critical tendencies of the Reformation and The Enlightenment. Existing social classes, much to Comte's chagrin, tended to polarize and to support either one or the other.

Hence, class conflict, disorder and anarchy. In every crisis, the retrograde party argued that the problem was due to the destruction of the old order and therefore demanded its complete restoration; the anarchical party, in contrast, argued that the trouble stemmed from the fact that the destruction of the old order was incomplete, and, therefore, that the revolution must continue. Comte appreciated certain aspects of the feudal-theological order and did not reject it altogether. True, it had become 'pernicious' by outliving its usefulness, but it had facilitated the development of modern society. Since, however, it can no longer hold its own before the natural progress of scientific intelligence and other social changes, the theological polity can never again become the basis of social order. Thus Comte, unlike Ronald, believed it was impossible to restore the old order. The decline of the old is not temporary; neither is it the work of Providence. Somehow, Comte argues, a synthesis of the opposing ideas, order and progress, must be achieved, because only through intellectual unity and harmony can social unity be restored.

Science and industry were the main causes of the decline of the feudal theological order, and the rise of the scientific spirit now precludes the restoration of that order; likewise with the industrial spirit, which now prevents the recurrence of the feudal-military spirit. Moreover, the new spirit is so strong that the spokesmen for the theological school are themselves infected with it. The principles of the 'metaphysicians', Comte's term for the Enlightenment thinkers, were essentially critical and revolutionary. They contributed to progress but only in a negative sense. The metaphysical stage was necessary because it broke for the next stage the positive one which will put an end to

Check Your Progress

1. Which incident in Comte's life served as a turning point for his philosophical career?
2. What were Comte's views on sociology?
3. What is ontogeny?
4. Which is the second stage of the evolution of human mind?
5. What forms the basis of all human associations, as per Comte?

NOTES

the revolutionary period by the formation of a social order uniting the principles of order and progress. The metaphysical spirit was necessary to direct the struggle and organize the maximum energy for the overthrow of the great ancient system. But, it, too, has outlived its usefulness and has become obstructive. Social reorganization requires intellectual reorganization, and this is impossible so long as individuals have the right of inquiry on subjects above their qualifications. Comte insists that unity and unanimity will be essential in the new organic society.

The Advent of Positive Philosophy

Comte had great confidence in the ascendancy of the positive doctrine. Positive philosophy, he believed, is undoubtedly superior to its predecessors. For while the metaphysical school condemned all periods prior to the Revolution, and the retrograde school disparaged the whole of the modern era, only the positive principle is able to recognize 'the fundamental law of continuous human development, representing the existing evolution as the necessary result of the gradual series of former transformations, by simply extending to social phenomena the spirit which governs the treatment of all other natural phenomena'. We must let Comte speak for himself to demonstrate the degree to which he advanced his positive doctrine with one purpose in mind to avert revolution and to achieve the resignation of the 'multitude' to the conditions of the existing order. He explicitly pushes to the extreme some of the conclusions which were only implicit in Saint-Simon's work and purges from that work every last critical element that might have remained. It is only by the positive polity that the revolutionary spirit can be restrained because by it alone can the influence of the critical doctrine be justly estimated and circumscribed under the rule of the positive spirit again. All the difficult and delicate questions which now keep up a perpetual irritation in the bosom of society, and which can never be settled while mere political solutions are proposed, will be scientifically estimated, to the great furtherance of social peace.

At the same time, it (the positive polity) will be teaching society that, in the present state of their ideas, no political change can be of supreme importance, while the perturbation attending change is supremely mischievous, in the way both of immediate hindrance, and of diverting attention from the true need and procedure. Again, the positive spirit tends to consolidate order, by the rational development of a wise resignation to incurable political evils. A true resignation, that is, a permanent disposition to endure, steadily and without hope of compensation, all inevitable evils, can proceed only from a deep sense of the connection of all kinds of natural phenomena with invariable laws. If there are political evils which, like some personal sufferings, cannot be remedied by science, science at least proves to us that they are incurable, so as to calm our restlessness under pain by the conviction that it is by natural laws that they are rendered insurmountable.

Human nature suffers in its relations with the astronomical world, and the physical, chemical and biological, as well as the political one. How is it that we turbulently resist in the last case, while, in the others, we are calm and resigned? Finally, the positive philosophy befriends public order by bringing back men's understanding to a normal state through the influence of its method alone, before it has had time to establish any social theory. It dissipates disorder at once by imposing a series of indisputable scientific conditions on the study of political questions. By including social science in the scientific hierarchy, the positive spirit admits to success in this study only well-prepared and disciplined minds, so trained in the preceding departments of knowledge as to be fit for the complex problems of the last.

NOTES

The positive conception of progress is superior to all others, and especially superior to the revolutionary view in which progress consists of the continuous extension of freedom, and the gradual expansion of human powers. The scientific elite will be the final authority on what these laws are and will indicate the degree to which the lot of the lower classes may be slowly improved. In this way the positive doctrine will provide a so-called constructive alternative to the insurrectionary solution advocated by the revolutionary school. Basic economic and political institutions are not to be changed, for history has shown that such change avails nothing. Class structure should remain as it is; and class conflict presumably will be reduced, even eliminated, through the moral reconciliation of the classes. This will be facilitated by imposing a moral authority between the working classes and the leaders of society.

Order and progress are the static and dynamic aspects of a society. Order refers to the harmony which prevails among the various conditions of existence, while progress refers to the society's orderly development according to natural social laws. Thus the two principles, previously mutually antagonistic, are reconciled. It is natural and normal for the elements of the social system, the institutions of society, to be interdependent and interrelated. Therefore, even for analytical purposes social elements should not be contemplated separately as if they had an independent existence. All the parts of the system make up a harmonious whole, which, by definition, is divested of all-conflictive, contradictory and antagonistic elements. He enunciates as a scientific principle 'that there must always be a spontaneous harmony between the whole and the parts of the social system'. But harmony will establish itself through radical consensus, the only condition proper to the social organism. Emphasis is always on adjustment to the 'natural' social laws, quite deliberately opposed to Enlightenment principles where the emphasis is on changing the social system to allow for the infinite perfection of man. Again and again Comte stresses that the scientific method requires that society be studied as a whole and not separated into its component parts.

It is as if he fears that the logical analysis of a society's institutions will inevitably lead to its actual dissolution. Social dynamics refers to the study of the patterns of evolutionary progress in which the sequences of development are necessary and inevitable. Social dynamics, then, is really 'dynamic order' proceeding according to natural, orderly and necessary laws.

The tendency towards improvement is spontaneous, and therefore does not require any special political action directed towards change. The latter is in effect 'superfluous', because each stage is as perfect as it can be. Not only political action but human action in general is very limited in its effects and subject to the constriction of natural laws. The human race could perhaps accelerate or retard certain tendencies but never change the nature of those tendencies. It certainly cannot reverse certain orders of development nor can it skip stages.

The importance of human action, in general, and political action, in particular, has been greatly exaggerated. He emphasized such techniques as observation, experiment and comparison. And in spite of the transparent ideological elements of his methodology, he does manage to grasp some of the principles of scientific method which always remains subordinated, however, to the construction of his hierarchical, organic, authoritarian society.

Observation is impossible without theory, first to direct it and then to interpret, that is, observed facts cannot speak for themselves. Facts must be attached at least by

NOTES

a tentative hypothesis to the laws of social development. But for Comte, as we seen, these laws as well as all his assumptions and concepts about society were in the first instance inspired by their ideological function. The whole apparatus of his positive doctrine is ideological in the strictest sense of that term, and science never achieves very much autonomy in his doctrinaire and totalitarian system. He remained blind throughout his work to the ideal of freedom even as it related to science and apparently failed to see how many aspects of society he had dogmatically closed off from the view of science by means of his doctrinaire pronouncements.

As Comte proceeds in his exposition of social statics, he takes into consideration the individual, the family and society. He stated that the family, not the individual, is the true social unit; for the family is the school of social life. Man is a social being whose social nature is formed in the family context.

But these assertions and the like are always made with a specific ideological intention in mind. The subordination of woman is natural and will continue in the 'new' society: The female sex is in a state of perpetual infancy. 'Sociology will prove that the equality of the sexes, of which so much is said, is incompatible with all social existence.' Thus Comte argues the organic inferiority of woman and attempts to provide a 'scientific' rationale for the same state of affairs that the theological school regarded as determined by Providence.

Generally, 'providential wisdom', though in a secularized form, dominates Comte's conception of society and its development. The changes brought about by the inherent wisdom of the spontaneous evolutionary process are always 'superior to any that the most eminent reformers would have ventured to conceive of beforehand'. Nevertheless, there are developments which, though natural, can threaten the very existence of society, particularly its consensus and solidarity. Comte views the division of labour, growing increasingly complex, in this light. It seems to be an inexorable process, the very principle of society's development; but at the same time as the division of labour is extended, it seems to decompose and fragment society. Thus government is assigned the role 'to guard against and restrain the fundamental dispersion of ideas, sentiments and ideals, which is the inevitable result of the very principle of human development, and which, if left to itself, would put a stop to social progression in all important respects. Every element and institution of the society, including government, must serve to further stability, solidarity and order. Society is everything in Comte's scheme; the individual is nothing.

2.4 HIERARCHY OF SCIENCES

The hierarchy of sciences is another theory posited by Comte that gained importance in the realm of sociology. This theory is related closely to the law of the three stages. As mankind moves on from one stage to another, evolving from the knowledge of every step, similarly, scientific knowledge also pass from one stage to the next, evolving in every step, though at a different rate. 'Any kind of knowledge reaches the positive stage early in proportion to its generality, simplicity, and independence of other departments.' Thus, we notice that astrology, which is the most simple and general type of all natural sciences, developed first and was followed by chemistry, biology and physics. Sociology comes last in this list of sciences. The evolution and development of the sciences depended upon the developments of the sciences that came before it in a hierarchy marked by the law of increasing complexity.

NOTES

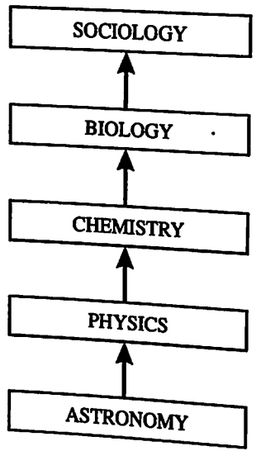


Fig. 2.1 Hierarchy of Sciences

The most independent and complex of all sciences are the social sciences. These developed after the other distinct sciences emerged and definitely helped in the completion of the modern, positive method. The sciences that evolved prior to the social sciences had just prepared the groundwork. The general sense of the natural law developed through the social sciences. This was possible as social science employs all the resources that physical sciences did, and also uses the historical method which investigate by gradual filtration, unlike other methods that investigate by comparison. The chief phenomenon in sociology that is the gradual and continuous influence of generations upon each other would be misguided or unnoticed for want of the necessary key historical analysis. Sociology, like all other later sciences, also depended on the special methodological characteristics.

It mostly depended on biology which, in turn, developed from the study of organic wholes. Sociology also shared this emphasis on organic unity with biology. If the society is divided into parts, sociology will fail to study it. The society can only be studied when it is treated as a whole consisting of various sub-parts. The parts of this whole are, however, treated by physical sciences better than by sociology.

2.5 SUMMARY

- According to Comte, a stable social order rested on a consistent form of thought. He saw his own thought as leading to the establishment of a more stable, industrial order. He saw this relationship between thought and practice as a natural rather than a causal one and saw thought as evolving naturally toward the kind of philosophy which he was formulating and recommending.
- The subject matter of sociology is society. It studies the structure of the society and the set of rules governing its functions.
- Sociology tries to explore these principles which help society to stay integrated and in order. According to him it is highly important that the law of sociology should be scientific.
- The method of sociology includes observation as well as experimentation. Observation must be guided by a theory of social phenomena.

Check Your Progress

6. Where was the principle of progress derived from?
7. What were the main causes of the decline of the feudal theological order?
8. What does order in a society refer to?

NOTES

- Each branch of knowledge passes through three stages, theological or fictitious, metaphysical or abstract, and scientific or positive.
- Social statics is concerned with the present structure of the society. It studies the current laws rule and present condition of the society.
- Social dynamics observed as to how the present social laws are affecting the society. It is also evaluates the social structure. Social statics also studies the correlation between various social facts.

2.6 KEY TERMS

- **Fetishism:** A belief that there is some living spirit in non-living objects.
- **Polytheism:** Stage where man had classified god and every natural force had a presiding deity.
- **Monotheism:** Belief that one God is supreme and that he is responsible for the maintenance of order and system in the world.

2.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Comte attempted suicide by throwing himself into the river Seine and was rescued by a passer-by. Comte interpreted this Samaritan act as a sign that his mission in life was to complete and disseminate his positive philosophy.
2. According to Comte, sociology is a social, organic science. Sociology is a relatively new, evolving science dependent upon all the foregoing theories in science. However, it is quite clear that sociology is gradually moving towards the goal of a *definite* science. Comte had a very wide conception of sociology.
3. Comte proposed that the evolution of the human mind is parallel to the evolution of any individual mind. The development of the individual human organism is termed as ontogeny. This forms the basis for the development of phylogeny or the development of the human race.
4. The metaphysical or abstract thinking marks the second stage in the evolution of human mind. According to Comte, each successive stage is an improvement upon the earlier stage. With the gradual improvement in human mind, human problems also become more intricate.
5. Family is the basis of all other human associations, for these evolved from family and kinship groups. He also argues that the classes and castes which form the basic tissues of the social systems, cities and towns are the integral organs.
6. The principle of progress was derived from the critical tendencies of the Reformation and The Enlightenment. Existing social classes, much to Comte's chagrin, tended to polarize and to support either one or the other.
7. Science and industry were the main causes of the decline of the feudal theological order, and the rise of the scientific spirit now precludes the restoration of that order; likewise with the industrial spirit, which now prevents the recurrence of the feudal-military spirit. Moreover, the new spirit is so strong that the spokesmen for the theological school are themselves infected with it.

NOTES

8. Order and progress are the static and dynamic aspects of a society. Order refers to the harmony which prevails among the various conditions of existence, while progress refers to the society's orderly development according to natural social laws.

2.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on Comte's early life.
2. How is sociology moving towards definite science?
3. List the various stages in the theological state.
4. What do you understand by social dynamics?

Long-Answer Questions

1. 'Sociology is a scientific study of society'. Discuss.
2. Analyse the hierarchy of science.
3. Discuss Comte's idea of human progress.

2.9 FURTHER READING

Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.

Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Boguardus, Emory S. 1969. *The Development of Social Theory*. Mumbai: Vakils, Feffa and Simons.

Jayapalan, J. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Ritzer, George. 1988. *Sociological Theory*, Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ritzer, George. 2007. *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Adams, Bert N., Rosalind Ann Sydie and R.A. Sydie. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Allan, Kenneth and Kenneth D. Allan. 2009. *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Calhoun, Craig J. 2002. *Classical Sociological Theory*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Edles, Laura and Desfor Scott Appelrouth. 2010. *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era: Text and Readings*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. 2007. *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. New York: Springer.

NOTES

UNIT 3 KARL MARX

Structure

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Unit Objectives
3.2 Dialectical Materialism
3.3 Materialistic Conception of History
  3.3.1 Stages of Human History
  3.3.2 Modes of Production and Practical Aspects of Historical Materialism
  3.3.3 An Assessment of Historical Materialism
  3.3.4 Alienation
3.4 Theory of Class Struggle
3.5 Theory of Capitalism
3.6 Summary
3.7 Key Terms
3.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.9 Questions and Exercises
3.10 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you studied the theories of Auguste Comte. In this unit, you will learn about Marx's conception of the dialectical approach which he derived from Hegel and which in fact shaped all of Marx's work.

As a student of sociology, you must have heard the name of Karl Marx. The thoughts of this philosopher and revolutionary had a huge impact on the history of the twentieth century; in fact, his writings continue to influence thinkers of political science, economy, history, etc., to this day. Despite his political orientation towards the creation of a communist society, Marx devoted much of his writings to the dialectical and critical analyses of capitalist society. The dialectic emphasizes that among the elements of social world there are no simple cause and effect relationships; fact and value are not seemingly divided clearly between a line; there are no hard and fast dividing lines among phenomena in the social world. Marx's analysis of actors and structure should be viewed in the framework of his opinions on human nature, which is also the starting point for his critical analysis of the contradictions inherent within the capitalist structure. Marx stated that a disagreement exists between our human nature and work in the capitalist system. Workers get alienated from their labour because it does not belong to them, but rather to the capitalist owners.

Marx's theories and opinions were a response to the quick changes taking place in Europe, primarily Germany, as a result of industrialization. He also studied the nature of the structures of capitalism and their adverse effects on the actors and elaborated on the pivotal role played by commodities in capitalism. He used the term 'reification' to explain the process whereby social structure becomes naturalised, absolute and independent of human action. In this context, it can be said that capital is the most reified component in a capitalist society.

NOTES

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss Marx's concept of dialectical materialism
- Explain Marx's materialistic conception of history
- Analyse the theory of alienation as given by Marx
- Discuss theory of class struggle
- Describe the theory of capitalism

3.2 DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Karl Marx was born in Trier, Prussia, on 15 May 1818. His father, a lawyer, provided the family with a fairly typical middle class existence. Both parents were from rabbinical families, but for business reasons, Marx's father had converted to Lutheranism.

In 1841, Marx received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin. The University of Berlin at that time was a school heavily influenced by Hegel and the young Hegelians, who were supportive, yet critical, of their master. Marx's doctorate was a dry philosophical treatise that bore little resemblance to his later, more radical and more pragmatic work. After graduation Marx became a writer for a liberal-radical newspaper and within 10 months became its editor-in-chief. However, because of its political position, the paper was closed shortly thereafter by the government. The early essays that Marx published during this period began to reflect a number of standpoints that would guide Marx throughout his life. These essays were liberally sprinkled with democratic principles, humanism and idealism. Marx rejected the abstractness of Hegelian philosophy, the naiveté and dreams of utopian communists, and those activists who were urging what he considered to be premature political action. In rejecting these activists, Marx laid the groundwork for his own life's work:

> Practical attempts, even by the masses, can be answered with cannon as soon as they become dangerous, but ideas that overcome our conviction, ideas to which reason has riveted our conscience, are chains from which one cannot break loose without breaking one's heart; they are demons that one can only overcome by submitting to them. (Marx, 1842/1977:20)

Marx married in 1843 and soon thereafter left Germany for the more liberal atmosphere of Paris. There Marx continued to grapple with the ideas of Hegel and the young Hegelians, but he also encountered two new sets of ideas—French socialism and English political economy. It was the unique way in which he combined Hegelianism, socialism and political economy that shaped his intellectual orientation. At this time he also met the man who was to become his friend, benefactor and collaborator—Friedrich Engels. The son of a textile manufacturer, Engels had become a socialist who was extremely critical of the conditions facing the working class. Much of Marx's compassion for the misery of the working class came from his exposure to Engels and his ideas. During this period Marx produced academic works —many of which were unpublished in his lifetime — that were mainly concerned with sorting out his link to the Hegelian tradition, for example *The Holy Family* and *The German ideology*. Marx also produced *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* which better integrated all of the intellectual tradition in which he was immersed and which foreshadowed his increasing preoccupation with the economic domain.

NOTES

While Marx and Engels shared a theoretical orientation, there were many differences between the two men. Marx tended to be a highly abstract thinker, a disorderly intellectual who was very oriented towards his family. On the other hand, Engels was a practical thinker who was a neat and tidy businessman.

They collaborated on books, articles and worked together in radical organisations. Engels even helped and supported Marx throughout the rest of his life so that Marx could devote himself to his intellectual and political endeavours.

In spite of the close association of the names of Marx and Engels, Engels made it clear that he was the junior partner. He once stated:

> Marx could very well have done without me. What Marx accomplished, I would not have achieved. Marx stood higher, saw farther and took a wider and quicker view than the rest of us. Marx was a genius. (Engels, cited in McLellan, 1973:w131-132)

Many theorists believe that Engels failed to understand many of the subtleties of Marx's work. After Marx's death, Engels became the leading spokesperson for Marxian theory and in various ways distorted and oversimplified it.

Since some of his writings had upset the Prussian government, the French government (at the request of the Prussians) expelled Marx in 1845, because of which he moved to Brussels. His radicalism was growing, and he had become an active member of the international revolutionary movement. He was also associated with the Communist League and was asked to write a document (with Engels) expounding its aims and beliefs. The result was Marx's most famous work *The Communist Manifesto* published in 1848, a work that was characterized by ringing political slogans, which today is recognised to be the most influential political manuscript ever written.

In 1849, Marx moved to London, and, in light of the failure of the political revolutions of 1848, he began to withdraw from active revolutionary activity and to move into serious and detailed research on the working conditions under capitalism. These studies ultimately resulted in the three volumes of *Capital,* the first of which was published in 1867 while the other two were published posthumously. He lived in poverty during these years, barely managing to survive on a small income from his writings and the support of Engels. In 1863, Marx became re-involved in political activity by joining the *International,* an international movement of workers. He soon gained dominance within the movement and devoted a number of years to it. He began to gain fame both as a leader of the *International* and as the author of *Capital*. But the disintegration of the *International* by 1876, the failure of various revolutionary movements, and personal illness took their toll on Marx. Marx died on 14 March 1883 with his friends and family burying his body in London. Marx's tombstone bears the message 'Workers of All Lands Unite', which is the final line of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Although Marx himself never used the term, many Marxists consider Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical source of several strands of Marxism. Joseph Dietzgen first used the term in 1887; however, it was only after Georgi Plekhanov—the father of Russian Marxism—used the term that it became a part of common usage in Marxian analysis.

Dialectical Materialism refers to the societal and economic transformation born of material forces. Essentially, the concept of dialectical materialism suggests that all historical growth and change results from the struggle of opposites. To put it another way, history is the creation of class struggle, i.e., the class struggle between the capitalist and landowning classes, on the one hand, and the proletariat and peasantry, on the other.

NOTES

Dialectical Materialism or 'diamat' follows the Hegelian principle of philosophy of history, which is the growth of thesis into anti-thesis that is sublated by synthesis. This synthesis preserves the thesis and the anti-thesis and simultaneously rises above them both.

Law of Dialectics

Marxism is a fundamentally materialist philosophy because its foundation is the belief that the overall account of everything is matter which is the characteristic of reality. Another important aspect of Marxian analysis is the belief that matter is independent in forming the course of nature which detaches dialectical materialism.

According to Engels, 'All nature, from the smallest thing to the biggest, from a grain of sand to the sun, from the Protista to man, is in a constant state of coming into being and going out of being, in a constant flux, in a ceaseless state of movement and change.' Thus, the fundamental suggestion of dialectics is that everything is in a continuous process of change, motion and development. Even when there is an appearance that no change is taking place, actually, matter is always changing. Molecules, atoms and subatomic particles are always on the move, continually changing place. Therefore, dialectics is essentially a dynamic understanding of the phenomena and processes which occur at all levels of both organic and inorganic matter.

Using Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Engels derived the three laws of dialectics. Through the laws Engels tries to respond to the problems associated with both nature and humanity. Marxian analysis uses the laws to answers queries such as:

- What is the starting point of energy or activity start in nature?
- Why does the continuous proration in the number of galaxies, solar system, planets, animals and all the realms of nature take place?
- When does the mind begin to become aware of things?
- Why is society regulated and in which direction is such regulation headed?
- Does the study of the past include an ending; if it is then what will it be?

The three laws of dialectics are as follows:

Law of Opposites

Marx and Engels began with the impression that everything in reality is a combination of opposites. An illustration of this point is that electricity is made up of a positive and negative charge. Moreover, any student of science can tell you that atoms are made up of protons and electrons that are united, but essentially are opposing forces. Engels' conclusion is that everything 'contains two mutually incompatible and exclusive but nevertheless equally essential and indispensable parts or aspects'. The essential idea is that this coming together of opposites in the natural world is the trait which makes every unit auto-dynamic in nature. It also ensures a nonstop drive for movement and transformation. As Hegel stated, 'contradiction in nature is the root of all motion and of all life'.

This dichotomy more often than not exists in the natural world. In space gravity drives every molecule to the core of a star allowing it to be held collectively, at the same time, extremely high temperatures force the molecules to stay as far away from the core as possible. If either of any of the two pulls is totally successful, the star does not survive. If extremely high temperature is triumphant, the star blows up into a supernova. On the other hand, a black hole or a neutron star is the result if gravitational pull is

NOTES

successful in pulling molecules to the core of a star. Similarly, live beings endeavour to stabilize inside and outside forces to sustain the state of homeostasis, i.e., the stabilization of contrasting powers, like acidity and alkalinity.

Law of Negation

According to the law of negation, there is a predisposition in the environment towards continuously raising the numerical amount of all things. Marx and Engels state that to organize, to move forward or to replicate a superior number, creatures are inclined in the direction of negating themselves. The nature of opposing forces is such that it is inclined to negate the thing itself, at the same time this negation results in divergence in every part and gives them movement. Consequently, creatures progress because of this energetic course of beginning and obliteration. This law can also be framed as the sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

To illustrate the law of negation, Engels frequently referred to the example of the barley seed. The barley seed in the natural state sprouts (which is the death of a seed or negation) and produces a plant, which grows into ripeness. After the plant becomes ripe, it is itself negated after giving birth to barley seeds. In the social world, class also illustrates the law of negation. Historically speaking, the nobility was wiped out by the bourgeoisie revolution; this also helped create the proletariat. In Marxian analysis, this proletariat will eventually wipe out the bourgeoisie. Thus, this law suggests that every class produces its own 'gravediggers', its heirs, no sooner it finishes laying to rest its originator.

Law of Transformation

The law of transformation states that constant quantitative growth leads to changes in quality by 'leaps' in the environment, resulting in the production of a totally new variety of creature. This is the way in which 'quantitative development becomes qualitative change'. In the process of transformation, the rendering null and void of quality affecting quantity is also permitted.

This law has many similarities to the theory of evolution. Marxian analysis suggests that creatures in the course of quantitative growth are in addition essentially able to 'leap' to new appearances and stages of realism. The law is shown by the example of a volcanic eruption after the process of years of pressure building up. When the magma cools down after an eruption, it turns the land which was unproductive into productive land. In the social world, years of stress among contrasting classes or groups in society become the cause of an uprising. The law also occurs in reverse. For example, the introduction of better agriculture tools (changing quality) to farmland help in producing bigger amount (changing quantity) of agriculture output.

Lenin and Dialectical Materialism

In his treatise *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908) Lenin provided a detailed description of dialectical materialism. According to Lenin, it involves approximately three axes:

(i) The 'materialist invention' of Hegelian dialectics

(ii) The historicity of moral philosophy designed to class conflict

(iii) The junction of 'laws of evolution' in physics (Helmholtz), biology (Darwin) and in political economics (Marx)

NOTES

During Lenin's time, the preceding values of matter and materialism were confronted by new findings in physics such as x-rays, electrons and the initial stages of quantum mechanics. Matter looked as if it was vanishing. In this regard, Lenin stated:

> 'Matter disappears' means that the frontier within which we have until now known, matter vanishes, as our understanding is becoming insightful and deeper; the qualities of matter are fading compared to previously which looked total, not changeable, and basic, and which are at the moment exposed to be comparative and distinctive only at certain levels of matter. For the sole 'property' of matter with whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound up is the property of being an objective reality of existing outside of the mind.

Lenin's major contribution then was to place materialism as a practical philosophical viewpoint away from what he considered as the 'regular materialism' uttered in declarations like that of the 18th century physician Pieve Jean Georges Cabanis who stated, 'the brain secretes thought in the same way as the liver secretes bile', the idea of 'metaphysical materialism' which believed that matter consisted of immutable, unchanging particles, or the idea of 'mechanical materialism' which believed that matter was similar to tiny molecular billiard balls mixing according to uncomplicated laws of mechanics. The explanation of Marxist theoreticians like Lenin and Engels to these arguments was of course 'dialectical materialism', in which matter was implicitly considered in the wider logic of 'objective reality' which was consistent with the new discoveries made in science.

Materialism in Dialectical Materialism

Materialism affirms that the natural world is material in nature, and all occurrences in creation are due to 'matter in motion'. Moreover, it suggests that all things are interdependent and interconnected and develop in accordance with natural laws. It also holds that the world exists outside us which is independent of our perception of it, and the content we think is the reflection of the materialism in our mind; and that the world is in principle predictable. Marx in *Das Kapital* stated, 'The ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought'. Thus, as opposed to Hegel's idealism, Marx endorsed a materialist philosophy turning Hegel's dialectics 'upside down'.

The wisdom of Marx's conception of materialism was that Marx believed that philosophy must take its position in the class struggle, or it will get reduced to religious idealism (such as Kant or Hegel's philosophies). This idea of materialism conceptualized by Marx also helped paved the way for the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School's ideas of critical theory.

Marxist Criticism of Dialectical Materialism

The conception of Dialectical materialism was also criticized by academicians like the French Marxist Louis Althusser and the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci who conceptualised a Marxist 'philosophy of praxis' in its place. Marxist scholars who rejected dialectical materialism returned to the original manuscripts of Marx and Engels and produced new Marxist theoretical proposals and ideas substituting the idea of dialectical materialism. The father of the Chinese revolution Mao Zedong in his essay *On Contradiction* discarded the 'laws of dialectics' and pursued the complication of the negation. Mao's essay influenced Althusser's own work on negation which became the subject of his well-known essay *For Marx* in 1965. In the essay, Althusser tries to tone the Marxist thought of 'contradiction' by making use of the notion of 'over-determination' from psychoanalysis. Althusset's 'philosophy of the subject' or 'anti-humanism' helped him conceptualise the notion of 'random materialism' as opposed to dialectical materialism. In an effort to solve the dilemma in a different way, Italian thinker Ludovico Geymonat made a historical epistemology from dialectical materialism. Althusser supported the epistemological method and focused on the denial of the division among subject and object which resulted in making Marx's theory mismatched with its antecedents.

NOTES

3.3 MATERIALISTIC CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

The concept of history according to Karl Marx is known as dialectical or historical materialism. 'To Marx', explains Larson 'matter is not a product of mind: on the contrary, mind is simply the most advanced product of matter.' Though Marx rejected Hegel's content orientation, he retained the dialectical structure. 'Historical materialism is the Marxist theory of society. This is clear in a detailed passage in the Preface to '*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.*'

3.3.1 Stages of Human History

One of the primary themes contained in Karl Marx's '*The Communist Manifesto* 'is the stages of human history. He differentiated the stages of human history on the basis of their economic regimes and categorized them into four modes of production which he called the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the bourgeois.

Being a materialist, Karl Marx believes thoughts to be based on facts. According to Marx, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.'

In this way, social laws change along with the history of social and economic evolution. There have always been conflicting classes in society. From historical evidence, these conflicting classes have three major forms, which are as follows:

- Society of slave tradition
- Aristocratic society
- Capitalist society

According to Marx, only a communist society can resolve the conflict. Even the economic basis of social evolution has two parts:

- Means of production
- Economic relations

The first comprises machines and second, ownership and ways of distribution etc. The order of society underwent a change with the development of the classes. With the development of agricultural implements, it entered into a state of agriculture.

The industrial age was conceived with the discovery of industrial machinery. In the same way, society underwent important changes with the entry of banks and currency into the medium of distribution.

3.3.2 Modes of Production and Practical Aspects of Historical Materialism

Therefore, the history of society is reflected in the history of development and the law governed during the successive modes of production. This succession passes through six consecutive modes of production and you will learn about them ahead in detail.

Check Your Progress

1. Where did Karl Marx receive his doctorate?
2. Why was *The Communist Manifesto* written?
3. What is the premise of the Law of Opposites as per Marx and Engels?
4. According to Lenin, what are the three axes of dialectical materialism?

NOTES

Primitive society: This was the first and the lowest form of organization of people. It existed for thousands of years. In this stage, men made use of primitive implements. The relations of production and the productive forces were not very developed. Everything was done on communal basis. The people tilled the communal land together with common tools and lived in a common dwelling, sharing products equally. The productive forces developed slowly. With the growth of the productivity, the clan began to break into families. The family became the owner of the means of production. Thus, private property arose and with it, social inequality. This resulted in the first antagonistic classes—masters and slaves.

Slave society: In the earlier stages of human society, called primitive communism by Marx, the community was a society. People did not have the need of accumulation. However, when man started using the result of one day's labour over a number of days, the tendency to accumulate increased. This was the beginning of the convention of wealth.

Ownership of objects spread to ownership of men because slaves helped to increase the inflow of objects. In this way, the slave and master classes came into being in society and consequently, master and slave morality grew. This increased dissatisfaction which, in its turn, led to class conflict. Slaves revolted against masters for equal rights.

Feudal society: As time passed, the masters did concede some rights to slaves. Though the slaves possessed some ownership over land, a major portion of the yield still went to the master. It was the inception of 'lordship society'. In this society, too, there were two conflicting classes—serfs and lords. Lords were superseded by kings or emperors. The serfs laboured and the lords or kings benefited. In order to give sanction to the authority of kings and lords, religion was resorted to.

In this way, religious ethics were born and the concepts of Heaven and Hell came into being. God was recognized as the religious emperor under whom lay many gods and goddesses. The serf was taught to pray to this God and to rest satisfied with his lot, which was allocated to him by God. It was God who had vested authority in the king. Also, there were lords authorized by the king. Thus, to obey their orders was the duty of the public. There was a vast difference in the status of the ruler and the ruled.

Capitalist society: In this age, conflicts in the lordship system became more intense. On the other side, steam was discovered in the forces of production and factories derived power from steam engines. The lords abandoned their dukedoms and entered the industrial field. They created the capitalist or owner class. They joined hands with businessmen and white-collared middle class people. The serfs went on to become the labour class. Thus, society was again stratified into two layers or classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In the bourgeois and proletariat morality too, there is a tremendous conflict as in all conflicting classes. The policy of the bourgeois is one of exploitation. They have nothing to do with the problems of the proletariat. Resorting to secular orders, laws of action and religion, they preach lessons of humbleness and patience to the labourers.

Socialist society: After the working class has been exploited to the hilt, it looks for an escape. Class consciousness is built up that leads to revolution against the capitalists and if it is successful, socialism is gained. In socialism, production is directed by the elected councils of the workers. The means of production are transferred from the hands of capitalists to that of the workers. He called this change the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Economically, each worker is paid according to the amount of labour he contributes to society.

NOTES

Communist society: The communist society, according to Marx, is the future society aimed at by all forms of development and revolution in society. This is best defined by the Party Programme in USSR as, 'Communism is a classless social system with one form of public ownership of the means of production and full social equality of all members of society under it, the all-round development of people will be accompanied by the growth of the, productive forces through continuous progress in science and technology; all the springs of cooperative wealth will flow more abundantly, and the great principle, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" will be implemented. Communism is a highly organized society of free, socially conscious working people in which public self-government will be established, a society in which labour for the good of society will become life's prime want of everyone, a necessity recognized by one and all, and the ability of each person will be employed to the greatest benefit of the people.'

In the communist state, the class struggle will come to an end. The disparity between mental and physical labour will lose recognition and the government and religion will be destroyed. Only then will true morality be conceived.

3.3.3 An Assessment of Historical Materialism

Historical materialism or the materialist conception of history is the direct application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the development of society. Karl Marx made it the cornerstone of his social and political philosophy. Even though Marx does not explain what he means by his theory of historical materialism, it is based on the economic interpretation of history. Marx probably used the word 'materialistic' to contrast his theory with that of Hegel as sharply as he could.

The theory of the materialistic conception of history starts with the belief that economic activities are the basis of political, legal, cultural and religious institutions and beliefs. Various forms of state or varieties of legal system cannot be taken as results of the development of human mind but have their origin in the material conditions of human life. The theory starts with the simple truth that man must eat to live and in order to eat, he must produce. Thus, his survival depends upon the success with which he can fulfil his needs.

Production is the most important of all human activities. Society is the result of these necessities of man. Marx grouped the efforts of man in this regard into four main stages:

- Primitive or Asiatic stage
- Ancient stage
- Feudal stage
- Capitalist stage

In all these stages, the class which controls the means of production controls the rest. It is this fact of domination which creates a perpetual state of tension and conflict. In all stages of human life, the forces or conditions of production determine the structure of society.

Marx's theory of materialistic conception of history contain a greater amount of truth than his dialectical materialism. According to Marxist thinker Carew Hunt, all modern writers on social sciences are indebted to Marx, even if they do not admit it. In this sense, Marx's historical materialism or economism represents a very valuable advance in the methods of social sciences.

NOTES

However, it is impossible to explain all historical movements exclusively in economic terms. Marx's theory ignores the fact that human passions, sentiments, emotions and religion also influence human behaviour. As a philosophical doctrine, the economic interpretation of history is incapable of universal application.

We may see reason in the emphasis laid down by Marx on economic factors, though history cannot be explained in terms of decisions made by politicians and kings acting in a vacuum. The major problem arises when the views of Marx are offered as a complete explanation of extremely complex phenomena. Many ideals which, according to Marx, were only reflections of material interests of one's place in the economic order, actually attain independent status. It is possible that Karl Marx and his colleague Engels recognized the over-emphasis that was laid on the economic factors. The excessive zeal of some of his admirers to make his ideas rigid led Marx on one occasion to say that he was not a Marxist. By this, he seems to have meant that he was rigid when they were applying the materialist conception of history.

3.3.4 Alienation

Karl Marx's essay *The Origins and Development of Capitalism* discussed how capitalism emerged in Europe. Marx suggested in the essay that the increase in trade around the world as a result of European colonization of the Americas and East Asia in the 17th century led to a corresponding increase in the need for trade goods. Since the feudal mode of production could not respond to the increase in the need for trade goods, there was a requirement to change the mode through which such products were produced. This necessarily involved changing the relationship between the product and the producer. This is how the capitalist mode of production emerged.

According to Marx, in feudalism, although the landlord would take a segment of the harvest from the peasant population under his control, the peasants themselves remained in contact with the means of production. On the other hand, Marx states under capitalism, the means of production are privately owned by a minority of the members of society who, acting largely independently of one another, tend to employ these means in such a way so as to get the maximum amount of profit on their investment. This capitalist class to a large extent also influences the nature of the means of production as their investment choices at the end of the day determine the selection of the means from the range of possibilities afforded by the technical capabilities of society; they even exercise a certain influence on the rate and direction of technical developments taking place in society. Thus, under capitalism the labourer is separated – or alienated – from the means of production, becoming a 'free' labourer; free to be exploited as a wage labourer, rather than as a chattel of the feudal lord.

However, the mode of production is not the only thing that changes when the transition from feudalism to capitalism takes place. Under capitalism, the nature of the product also changes, i.e., products become commodities — they not only have a use value, but an exchange value as well. In fact, under capitalism, products are produced especially as exchange goods, i.e., trade goods, which makes the use value of the product incidental to and separate from its value as a trade good. Thus for Marx, commodity production isolates the worker as a supplier of only commodity labour.

According to Marx, the choice of investments made under the capitalist mode of production is in the long run not random or at the mercy of individual capitalists, but is tightly constrained through competition with other capitalists by the requirement of profit maximization. Those capitalists who choose methods of production which maximize

NOTES

profits will survive and flourish; those who make different choices will lose their capital and the social power it represents. But the division of labour and the nature of individual labouring activity are largely determined by the means and techniques labour must employ. Hence, under capitalism the factors which determine the life activities of the labouring majority are not in its hands but in the hands of a minority whose interests are opposed to its own; and the choices made by this minority are constrained by a principle (profit maximization) which deprives people of the well-rounded variety of powers and activities which they need to be full human beings; it also tends to render their specialties themselves more and more mechanical, dehumanizing in nature, less and less a matter of developed skills or powers. Consequently, capitalist manufacture creates a positive need for mechanical, unskilled labour, a need unknown to pre-capitalist handicraft manufacture. It is plain that Marx blames capitalist social relations, and not the technical requirements of modern industry, for the fragmentation of human beings and the impoverishment of their individual powers.

In *Capital*, Marx argues in detail that there is no such happy coincidence, that it is just the kind of production dictated by profit maximization which has led to the alienating division of labour he describes. Marx believes that far from being incompatible with the technical requirements of modern industry, the potentiality for varied, well-rounded human activity is inherent in modern scientific manufacturing itself, and will begin to appear naturally as soon as production comes to be regulated consciously by the workers instead of being driven blindly by dead capital's vampire-like thirst for profit at the expense of human life. Marx stated, 'The nature of large industry conditions change of labour, fluidity of function, all-sided mobility of the labourer'. Every step in technical progress demonstrates this fact by changing the labouring function required for manufacture, thus rendering whole categories of detail labourers (who have been trained only for one function) productively superfluous, and (under capitalist conditions) doing away with their only marketable skill. 'Change of labour' and 'fluidity of function' are not, however, inherently destructive or crippling. On the contrary, they represent precisely the potentiality for all-sided human development whose suppression under capitalism is a chief cause of alienation. But if change of labour now imposes itself as an overpowering natural law... large industry through its catastrophies makes it a question of life or death to recognize the change of labour and hence the greatest possible many-sidedness of the labourer as a universal law of social production, and adapt its relation to the normal actuality of this law; to replace the partial individual, the mere carrier of a detail function, with the totally developed individual, fit for the changing demands of labour, for whom different social functions are only so many modes of activity relieving one another.

For Marx, bringing fulfillment and meaning to the lives of human beings is entirely dependent on the development and exercise of their essential human powers, whose focus is labour or production. Due to the historical nature of these human powers that vary according to society and expand in the course of history, the degree to which alienation is an organized social occurrence also varies, as a function both of what society's productive capacities are and of the extent to which the human potentialities they embody have been integrated into the lives of actual men and women. In general terms, the degree of alienation that exists in a capitalist society is directly proportional to the gap between human potential in the society's productive powers and its actual realization. Thus, for Marx, the possibility for alienation increases along with the productive powers of a society. For as these powers expand, there is more and more room for a discrepancy between what human life is and what it might be. There is more and more pressure on social arrangements to allow for the lives of individual human beings to

NOTES

share the wealth of human capacities which belong to social labour. Marx's criticism of capitalism thus makes it clear that it is a system in which social arrangements have completely failed to accommodate the potentialities for self-actualization which the social powers of production have put within people's reach.

3.4 THEORY OF CLASS STRUGGLE

According to Marxist analysis, a collection of persons having familiar characteristics is not a class. For example, the proletariat cannot be labelled as a collection of people 'as against capital'. In a societal setting, class is not organizational or related to a particular 'place' (a position in society which a person may possibly 'occupy' or persons might be 'interpolated', etc.). Rather, Marxists believe that class is a societal bond 'like capital itself' (Marx 1965, 766).

A bond is neither a collection of people even when there may be bonding in a specified collection of people or a position where a group may be formed or situated. Keeping away such ideas, it can be said that class is *the relation itself* (like the relationship between capital and labour) more particularly, *a relation of struggle*. Thus, the basic principle of *class* is *class struggle*. To put it another way, 'class struggle is class itself'. Marx noted that 'class struggle' is fundamental to 'class' by emphasizing that survival 'for itself'—which is the conflicting survival under pressure—is fundamental to the survival of 'class' (Marx 1969, 173).

Marxist and Sociological Analysis of Class

The sociological origin of the term class results in an awkwardness – every person of bourgeois society is not clearly the integral part of the groups labelled 'capitalists' and 'proletarians'. This awkwardness is produced by the origin of classes as 'groups' or 'places' and to escape this sociological Marxism has taken refuge in labels like 'middle strata', 'middle classes' and so on. These labels are residual or consisting of the collection of people and are academic fabrications created by poor theoretical system. On the other hand, Marxist origin of class comes across no such problems, which considers class-bonding (for example, capital-labour bonding) as organizing the lives of dissimilar persons in dissimilar ways.

There is a disparity among the Marxists and sociological analysis. Marxists observe the 'pure' labour (positioned at the farthest left-hand region), whose societal position (every one of dissimilar 'intermediate' forms) is not in any way at odds and in opposition to him, and he is by no means 'methodologically' advantaged; nor the 'pure' industrialist. Together they somewhat are viewed merely as forms fused together with each other in differently arranged multitude. Alternatively, the sociological observation takes care of the 'pure' labour in addition to the 'pure' industrialist like 'methodological pillars' suspended among the network of transitional classes.

According to Marx, this dissimilarity is significant as the 'pure' worker or labour does not exist. This is not for the reason of comparative reduction of the size of the 'traditional working class' (even if the particular hypothetically imagined collection of people is distinct). In fact, the opposite is true as the income bonding is a 'bourgeois and mystifying form' (Marx 1965 Part VI). And whosoever stays within its parameter, even and particularly the industrialist, who is a manufacturer of 'surplus value', lives a life separated with himself. His roots stay caught up in exploiting the labour while he dreams

Check Your Progress

5. What are the four modes of production according to Marx?
6. What were the characteristics of the feudal society according to Marx?
7. What is the context of alienation in Marx's theory of capitalism?
8. According to Marx, what brings true fulfilment to humans?

NOTES

of idealist 'bourgeois' reality. Therefore, the series of class conflict goes all the way through the person who produces 'surplus-value'.

Again, for the Marxist origin of class, there is no awkwardness in concerning the particular methods in which capital-labour bonding organizes in a hostile way. On the other hand, absence of the working class in its pristine form reduces the sociological origin of the class and brings it to the lowest level. An additional marked divergence among both formats of the Marxist view which states about a single class bonding (specifically, the capital-worker bonding) occurring in the present social order but the sociological proposal recognize numerous associations equal to the number of probable connections among societal space or collection of people. On this basis, the 'sociologists' lay blame on the 'Marxists' of decreasing societal divisions. In fact, sociologists have to be blamed of the charge of decreasing on these lines. The sociologists desire to place every person explicitly with no remnants in single or otherwise extra particular crowds or situations: a 'cross categorical' person is not capable of emerging within the depiction drawn by the sociologists.

The basis of sociologists' increase of societal divisions into various levels like 'middle class' 'new petty bourgeoisies', and so on is to search a clearly consigned slot for every person. Therefore, there exist specifically the patterns in which the expressions of class and the persons are alienated among themselves—the numerical complexity of the pattern system in which the 'geological fracture-line' of the conflict of class is present throughout is not just among person but casts a shadow on the hypothesis as well.

An associated position of Marxist origin is—different from that of sociologists'—that class is not interpreted in the expression of attitude having anyone of various societal responsibilities. Since his earliest work '*On the Jewish Question*' and beyond, Marx criticized any societal environment where classification of the responsibilities is acquired as 'alienated' and not liberated.

Far from marking the classification of responsibilities as a procedural theory, Marxian outlook of class portrays the person as a location of conflict; the individual conflict results in not merely as the 'universal' (attitude of responsibility and collectively alike), however in addition 'particular' (distinctive and in social context diverse) proportion of individualism participation. Neither theoretically nor practically has the classification of responsibilities liked 'proletarian' or 'bourgeois' (otherwise definitely 'man' or 'woman' or 'citizen') symbolizes the explanation of Marx; quite oppositely they form at the same time as one amongst the many tribulations which 'class' within its descriptions is proposed to solve.

While among the Marxist and the sociological origins of class, again one more spot of dissimilarity is, naturally, political. The sociological outlook promotes policy of coalitions among classes and portions of class: along with it gives emphasis to the 'pure' labourer's class an advantaged—important and dominant—political character. In Marxist outlook, there is impossibility of these types of coalitions. The 'pure' labourer class (a person in a job as compared to jobless, the 'direct' manufacturers of 'surplus value' compared to the 'indirect' manufacturers, the 'proletariat' compared to the '*lumpen proletariat*') does not have politically a procedural advantaged position, as these 'places' do not subsist.

There is no issue of assigning to 'rising' as compared to 'declining' classes to domination of radical significance or power: these terms only make sense as soon as classes are viewed as positions or as collectivity of people. Lastly, the entire idea of forefront political party (added with its watered down variations) is reversed as the

NOTES

dissimilarities among 'advanced' plus 'backward' class fundamentally fade away amid the sociological origin of class.

However, classes are not collectivity of people or positions except bonds of conflict, therefore radical struggle obtains the shape of struggle among the collectivity (for all times it happens improperly and contaminatingly) which is implicitly the result of class conflict. It is not implicitly sociological as in the case, the appearance of 'pre given' classes—next to very last—interested more in already known academic and opinionated 'truth'. The issue facing the person is not on *whose* region however relatively, on *which* region (which region of class bonding) he or she is situated; and yet this concluding query is not implicitly the collective preference among the surviving positions or responsibilities. Not merely, in terms of quantity as well as in terms of quality, the characteristic feature of conflict of class is natural inconsistency. The focal point of the Marxist origin of class penetrating the question of alternatives by means of which class conflict deals with us and in this procedure forbids plea to whichever responsibility or position or collectivity of people in which (according to sociology) we are by now situated *prior to* whatsoever our decisive promise we want to make.

The sociological origin of class, every time it needs to set up Marxist identification, forever turns into 'economic-determinist'. This is for the reason that the single 'indicator' of class link ('class' at this point being viewed again as a position or collectivity of people) is, according to Marx's work, the universal bonding to the 'means of production'. In addition to being bonded to the 'means of production', nevertheless persons are part of a class, and locate themselves bonded to the state and to 'ideology' and also to the local church and so on.

Therefore, the sociological origin of class produces a system of detached societal 'levels' or 'practices' or 'instances' (Althusser) and has to tackle query of how these 'levels' are linked. The reply is familiar: in the last instance 'the economic movement asserts itself as necessary'. In additional terminology, sociological Marxism totals to a fiscal conclusion with lengthy and intricate 'deterministic' series. To assert that, as Althusser did, such a premise is no longer fiscal is like maintaining that a machine is no longer machine due to the asset of number of cogwheels its motor drives.

The whole thing is dissimilar to the Marxist origin of class. Marx's difference among class 'in itself' and 'for itself' is in use as unique, not among the ranks of society but among the sociological and the Marxist origins of class itself: if a class turns out to be as soon as it is 'for itself' subsequently *political struggle* by means of all its erratic consequences and growth and expenses previously put together into what sociological Marxist identify as fiscal 'base'. While sociological Marxists try to unify ranks which it presumes to be separate and on the foundation of the threshold and difficulty can rely on the cause and effect and *external* associations nevertheless 'structural' (Althusser) variety; Marxist Marxism travels in the reverse direction and illustrates differences contained by an opposing entirety, i.e., inside an internally and destructively associated sum total: 'The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse' (Marx 1973, 101). The *totality* of the relation between various classes which is specific to, to take an example, bourgeois society is prevalent—wholly prevalent, though in characteristically different ways—in each individual who forms that society's *moments* or part. As Lukács stated, 'it is not the primacy of the economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality'.

NOTES

Alongside with 'the point of view of the totality', a completely new origin of *class politics* is initiated. Previously 'politics' is perceived as a separate societal rank; the confirming assessment of the survival of class 'for itself' develops into creation of a political association of almost traditional—meaning to say: 'a bourgeois'-type. It is viewed that still a forefront party is perceived to be a different 'bourgeois' idea. Nevertheless, the 'bourgeois' social order, not Marx differentiates among the ranks of political state and general social order—'On the Jewish Question'—and recommends the previous as the ground where the societal collection of people in their readiness may participate. In the added terms, Marxist origin of class, 'the point of view of totality' discards specifically the *narrowness* of the formation of politics which the sociological origin of class necessitates.

On top of the Marxist perception, the classification of politics develops into extensive variety in which class conflicts erratically take place. Not only no subject is disqualified from the political program; the idea of political program is itself disqualified as this type of program disqualifies and brings to periphery all that which is not part of some tentatively conventional political sphere of influence.

The already mentioned explanations do not assert to the wholeness or to the condition of a justification of the origin of the class which have been tried systematically to be retold. They aspire to, make it, some what lucid about what the Marxist perception of class involves. As for the consideration of the assessment of this perception, the proposition may possibly be dangerous that the *only possible* way of analytical inquiry which appears to be productive that which enquires is the 'capital-labour relation' is the only and exclusive such bonding of conflict which, in every part of its fulfilment, constitutes our lives. And at this point there can be no doubt of replacing Marx: additional types of bonding (sexual and racial bonds, for example) are arbitrated all the way through the 'capital relation' just as for its fractions; it subsists as arbitrated all the way through them.

The first and foremost sociologist and economist of the capitalist regime was Marx. He had a certain notion of that regime, of the fate it imposed upon men, and of the progression it would go through. As sociologist-economist of the system, he had the capitalist view of the sociological issues; he had no exact image of what the socialist system would be, and he repeatedly said that man cannot know the future in advance.

From 1848 until the end of his life, Marx apparently ceased to be a philosopher and became a sociologist and more of an economist. He had received an excellent economic education and knew the economic thinking of his time a few men did. He was, and wanted to be, an economist in the strict and precise sense of the word.

Communist Manifesto

In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels presented some of their scientific thoughts in combined form. The vital theme of the work was class struggle. In it they state that all history is the history of the class struggle: free men and slaves, patricians and plebeians, barons and serfs, master artisans and journeymen. In short, the oppressors and oppressed have been in perpetual conflict with one another and have carried on a relentless struggle, at times covert, at time open.

This struggle has always resulted in a revolution that changes the whole of society or with the mutual devastation of the warring classes. The work stated that all societies in human history have been divided into such warring classes, contemporary capitalist

NOTES

society is no different. However, what is different between contemporary capitalist society and societies that preceded is that the ruling class of capitalist society, i.e., the bourgeoisie, has certain characteristics which are without precedent.

Marxian analysis believes that the capitalist ruling class is unable to maintain its superiority without permanently revolutionizing the instruments of production. Thus, while previous ruling classes took many centuries to develop the forces of production, the ruling class of capitalist society was able to develop them in a few decades. *The Communist Manifesto* states that the means of production has been revolutionised by the bourgeoisie by engaging in heartless competition.

Moreover, they have created a global market for themselves which is destroying the leftovers of the feudal system and traditional communities. However, just like the forces that gave birth to capitalism developed in a feudal society, similarly, the forces of production which will give birth to socialism are developing in modern society.

According to Marx, between the capitalist ruling class and proletariat there exist various in-between groups like artisans, petite bourgeoisie, merchants and peasant landowners. However, he suggested that along with the development of the capitalist regime there will be a tendency towards crystallization of social relations into two groups: the capitalists and the working class or wage workers.

For Marx, only these two classes represent the possibility for a political system and an idea of a social system. When the revolution comes, everyone will be obliged to join either the capitalists or the working class. On the day when the working class seizes power, there will be a final split with the course of all previous history. In fact, the hostile nature of all known societies will disappear.

Marx thus regarded politics and the state as less important to what was occurring within the society itself. He presented political power as the appearance of social conflicts. Marx believed that in reality political power was the means by which the ruling class maintained its control and exploitation. Thus, the abolition of class contradictions must logically involve the disappearance of politics and of the state, because politics and the state are the expressions of social conflict.

The idea is that men enter into specific relations that are independent of their will; in other words, we can follow the progress of history by analysing the structure of societies, the forces of productions and the relations of production, and not by basing our explanation on men's ways of thinking about themselves. In every society there can be a notable economic base, or infrastructure, as it has come to be called, and the superstructure. The infrastructure consists basically of the forces and relations of production, while within the superstructure there are the legal and political institutions as well as ways of thinking, ideologies and philosophies. The instrument of the historical movement is the opposition between the forces and the relations of production. The forces of production seem to be basically a given society's capability to produce, a capability which is a function of scientific knowledge, technological equipment and the organization of combined labour while the relations of production seem to be basically distinguished by relation of property.

Check Your Progress

9. What is the disparity among the Marxists and sociological analysis?
10. What was the central theme of *The Communist Manifesto*?

3.5 THEORY OF CAPITALISM

Marx's adherence to the notion of freedom is explicit: to be free 'in the materialistic sense' is to be 'free not through the negative power of avoiding this and that, but through the positive might of making one's true individuality count'. In most modern thinkers

NOTES

before Marx, the conception of positive freedom is given a predominantly individualistic and moralistic interpretation. To be sure, they note that the exercise of this freedom requires the satisfaction of certain social (especially political) conditions. But they conceive self-determination itself chiefly as the inner volitional disposition of individual human agents, their mastery over their impulses and passions through rational self-knowledge and moral fortitude.

Given Marx's materialist conception of human beings as socially productive beings, he cannot be content with an introverted, spiritualistic sort of self-determination. For Marx, true self-determination must rather consist of the imposition of human control on the social conditions of human production.

Marx insisted that social institutions and relations of production are not facts of nature but historically transient social forms which are the products of human activity every bit as much as wheat, cloth or machinery. He does so in part to give the lie to those who would defend existing institutions by declaring them unalterable; but his purpose is also to make clear how much is required if human beings are to have genuine freedom or self-determination. If social relations are human products, then people cannot be accounted free until they create these relations with full consciousness of what they be (as Locke says) subject to the arbitrary will of others; it also requires the social relations in which they stand should be products of their own will. To recognize this fully is already to see through the sophistry which represents capitalist society as free because its relationships result not from coercive laws or the will of rulers but (apparently) by accident, from unregulated economic decisions made by individuals.

Freedom for Marx requires the conscious production of people's social relations, it is something which can be achieved only in community with others, and cannot be attained by retreating into oneself or by the exercise of one's self-determination within the confines of a jealously guarded 'private domain' in which society does not interfere. Yet Marx does not neglect to emphasize the complementary point that no society can be free unless it 'gives to each the social room for his essential life expression'. There can be no genuine freedom unless men and women have the opportunity to exercise choice over their own lives and develop their individuality fully and freely. Marx is the consistent foe of political repression, press censorship and other such measures which curb the free development and expression of individuals. He has only contempt for any brand of communism which would turn the state or community into 'the universal capitalist' by imposing a uniform, impoverished mode of life on all members of society alike. There can be no doubt that for Marx, individual liberty is necessary to a free society. But it is equally evident, to Marx at least, that the liberty proclaimed by bourgeois liberalism is not sufficient for genuine (that is, positive) freedom.

Human freedom can be attained only when people's social relations are subject to conscious human control. Therefore, it is only in communist society that people can be truly free, because human control over social relations can only be collective control, and only in communist society can this control be exercised by and for all members of society: Communism, says Marx, 'consciously treats all natural (*naturwüchsig*) presuppositions as creations of earlier human beings, divesting them of their natural character (*Naturwüchsigkeit*) and subjecting them to the might of the united individuals'. Only communist society can do this, because communist society will be a classless society, and in it, people will 'participate in society just as individuals.

Further, because individual self-expression and self-actualization are possible only through the capitalist division of labour, even individual freedom will become possible only with the collective human control over people's conditions of life. Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his abilities on all sides; hence

NOTES

personal freedom becomes possible only within the community. Marx does not conceive of social control over the means of production as the exclusion of individuals from ownership of what they produce and use. On the contrary, it is capitalism which involves such exclusion, since it delivers the means and objects of production over to a class of non-workers. Communism, as Marx sees it, will be a system of 'individual property for the producer', based on 'cooperation and the possession in common of land and the means of production'. The means of production must be owned collectively, because in modern industry, labour is directly social, and the disposition of the means of production is always an act affecting society as a whole. Such acts, in Marx's communism, will be performed consciously.

Decisions about them will be made democratically, by society as a whole, and not by a privileged class, acting contrary to the interests of the labouring majority and subject to the alien constraint of profit-maximization. Marx's critique of capitalism is based on some familiar philosophical value conceptions such as self-actualization and positive freedom.

Most of these issues are empirical ones, but this does not mean that they are clear cut or easily resolved. Any assessment seasoned with the proper scholarly caution would probably be inconclusive. It is unlikely that anyone, in Marx's time or today, knows enough to be entitled to a strong opinion for or against what Marx says about alienation and its social causes. If many people do hold strong opinions, this is largely because the only alternative to committing oneself in practice for or against Marx would be to take no effective stand whatsoever on the social reality around us.

Marx's account of alienation in capitalist society aims at substantiating three principal theses:

1. The vast majority of people living under capitalism are alienated.
2. The chief causes of this alienation cannot be removed so long as the capitalist mode of production prevails.
3. Alienation as a pervasive social phenomenon can and will be abolished in a post capitalist (socialist or communist) mode of production.

These three theses are obviously interrelated. Here, (1) is more or less presupposed by both (2) and (3). But (1) itself, as Marx understands it, is also dependent on (2) and (3), and on his grounds for holding them. In support of (1), a Marxist might cite widespread feelings of disorientation and dissatisfaction among people living in capitalist societies, or he might point to the preoccupation of philosophers, artists, social thinkers and popular consciousness with the problem of alienation, whether in an overtly Marxian or in various non-Marxian forms. But these considerations, however well substantiated, would not strictly show that alienation, as Marx understands it, exists in capitalist society.

By the same token, a critic of Marx cannot successfully rebut (1) merely by arguing that people in capitalist societies are on the whole satisfied with their lives, even if a convincing case for this could be made out. Alienation, as Marx conceives of it, is not fundamentally a matter of consciousness or of how people in fact feel about themselves or their lives. Alienation is rather a state of objective unfulfillment of the frustration of really existing human needs and potentialities.

The consciousness people have of this unfulfillment is merely a reflection of alienation, at most a symptom or evidence of it. Marx's real grounds for believing that people in capitalist society are alienated is not that they are conscious of being alienated, but rather the objective existence of potentialities for human fulfillment that must be frustrated as long as the capitalist mode of production prevails. Marx has no very definite

NOTES

conception of post-capitalist society or of the possibilities for fulfillment which he believes will be actualized in it. Hence, Marx does not believe (3) because he has some clear idea of the ways in which socialism or communism will provide people with opportunities for self-actualization.

Rather, he seems to believe that because he is confident that people can achieve a fulfilling life when the main obstacles to it are removed, and because he thinks he has identified these obstacles: they are the outmoded social relations of the bourgeois society.

Marx's confidence in the human potential of modern science and technology is initially plausible. To reject it is to embrace the paradox that increasing people's powers, their self-understanding and their interdependence has no tendency to enrich their lives, their freedom and their community. The burden of proof seems to be on anyone who would defend such paradoxes. It is not obvious that events in our century have rendered them more defensible than they were in Marx's time. Especially important for Marx's conception of our potentialities for freedom is his belief that the values of individuality and community are reconcilable, that post-capitalist society can simultaneously achieve greater individual autonomy and greater social unity than people's productive powers and social relations have hitherto permitted.

Marx's critics have been particularly suspicious of his silence concerning the social decision procedures through which free individuals are to achieve the rational collective regulation of their associated labour. At least since Rousseau, philosophers and political theorists have set themselves the problem of finding a form of human association which could unite individuals, putting the common might of society at the disposal of each while at the same time leaving all completely free to follow a self-chosen plan of life.

In his works Marx did not say much about the political or administrative structure of post-capitalist society, beyond insisting that it will be democratic and will involve control by the society itself rather than by a separate political mechanism or state bureaucracy. However, Marx did not view this as a procedural problem. Marx believed that the main obstacle to freedom of an individual and social unity was the class division of society. As long as such a division exists, the objectives of freedom and community are unattainable and seem opposed to each other. Marx states that in a classless society where one's person's individual freedom does not mean the slavery of another person, questions of social decision-making will not appear to people in the form of theoretical paradoxes or unsolvable technical problems. For Marx, as long as class division exists, any political mechanism will not promote genuine liberty or community, but only the ruling class interest that such a mechanism serves. Only after class is abolished can people begin to decide, on the basis of the productive capacities at their disposal, how they will live together as free individuals.

Marx does believe that alienation can be overcome in a modern, complex and industrialized society. But he is not necessarily committed to denying that there might be causes of alienation other than those specifically identified by his theory. The main burden of Marx's message is that capitalist social relations are the most pervasive and obvious cause of alienation, which must be abolished first, before lesser or more hidden causes can be dealt with. But there is no reason why Marx might not grant that such traditional social ills as religious fanaticism, racism and sexual oppression also contribute to alienation, and would have to be fought against even under socialism. Marx's explanation of alienation might also be challenged in some of its details. It is arguable, for instance, that Marx's views about the capitalist division of labour, whatever truth they might have had in his own century, are now obsolete.

Check Your Progress

11. Marx's account of alienation in capitalist society aims at substantiating three principal theses. What are they?

12. Does Marx believe that alienation can be overcome?

NOTES

Certainly it would be difficult to maintain that capitalism still exhibits a tendency to turn all labour into the unskilled mechanical sort, to 'make the absence of development into a specialty'. But even if this point is no longer defensible, Marx's explanation of alienation in terms of the capitalist division of labour may still be tenable. For the constraint of profit-maximization may still exercise a powerful (and harmful) effect on the nature of labouring activity, and inhibit the development of a well-rounded humanity on the part of workers. If this is so, then Marx's explanation of alienation in terms of the capitalist division of labour may still be essentially correct, even if the specific details of his account are not. Marx is always the first to insist that capitalism is not an immutable system, but one which is undergoing constant change. It would not be inconsistent with his views to recognize that his account of alienation in 19th century capitalist society might not be applicable in detail to its descendants in later centuries.

3.6 SUMMARY

- While Marx and Engels shared a theoretical orientation, there were many differences between the two men. Marx tended to be a highly abstract thinker, a disorderly intellectual who was very oriented towards his family. On the other hand, Engels was a practical thinker who was a neat and tidy businessman.
- Although Marx himself never used the term, many Marxists consider Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical source of several strands of Marxism. Joseph Dietzgen first used the term in 1887; however, it was only after Georgi Plekhanov—the father of Russian Marxism—used the term that it became a part of common usage in Marxian analysis.
- Dialectical Materialism refers to the societal and economic transformation born of material forces. Essentially, the concept of dialectical materialism suggests that all historical growth and change results from the struggle of opposites.
- According to the law of negation, there is a predisposition in the environment towards continuously raising the numerical amount of all things. Marx and Engels state that to organize, to move forward or to replicate a superior number, creatures are inclined in the direction of negating themselves.
- The law of transformation states that constant quantitative growth leads to changes in quality by 'leaps' in the environment, resulting in the production of a totally new variety of creature.
- The conception of Dialectical materialism was also criticized by academicians like the French Marxist Louis Althusser and the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci who conceptualised a Marxist 'philosophy of praxis' in its place.
- Being a materialist, Karl Marx believes thoughts to be based on facts. According to Marx, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.'
- Historical materialism or the materialist conception of history is the direct application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the development of society. Karl Marx made it the cornerstone of his social and political philosophy.
- According to Marxist analysis, a collection of persons having familiar characteristics is not a class. For example, the proletariat cannot be labelled as a collection of people 'as against capital'.
- From 1848 until the end of his life, Marx apparently ceased to be a philosopher and became a sociologist and, more of, an economist. He had received an excellent economic education and knew the economic thinking of his time a few men did. He was, and wanted to be, an economist in the strict and precise sense of the word.
- Marxian analysis believes that the capitalist ruling class is unable to maintain its superiority without permanently revolutionizing the instruments of production. Thus, while previous ruling classes took many centuries to develop the forces of production, the ruling class of capitalist society was able to develop them in a few decades.
- Marx insisted that social institutions and relations of production are not facts of nature but historically transient social forms which are the products of human activity every bit as much as wheat, cloth or machinery.
- In his works Marx did not say much about the political or administrative structure of post-capitalist society, beyond insisting that it will be democratic and will involve control by the 'society itself' rather than by a separate political mechanism or state bureaucracy.

Check Your Progress

11. Marx's account of alienation in capitalist society aims at substantiating three principal theses. What are they?
12. Does Marx believe that alienation can be overcome?

3.7 KEY TERMS

- **Diamat:** Diamat was a social theory coined by the 19th century philosopher Joseph Dietzgen. It emphasized commodities and the effects of their exchange over time. 'Diamat' is based upon three dialectical laws: 1. The identity of opposites; 2. the transition from quantity to quality; 3. the negation of negation.
- **Political economy:** The term for studying production, buying and selling, and their relations with law, custom and government, as well as with the distribution of national income and wealth, including through the budget process.
- **Surplus-value:** Karl Marx first used the idea of 'surplus-value' in his analysis of the political economy. Surplus-value refers to the new value of a particular product created by a working class individual that is in excess of their own labour costs.
- **Philosophy of Praxis:** The Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci stated that it is an ideological instrument that must be used to increase awareness among the masses about the mechanism of politics and culture, and awareness about the historical and economical determination of ideas. This would allow the masses to master their own lives and to 'lead their own society and to control those who lead'.

3.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. In 1841, Marx received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin.
2. Since some of his writings had upset the Prussian government, the French government (at the request of the Prussians) expelled Marx in 1845, because of which he moved to Brussels. His radicalism was growing, and he had become an active member of the international revolutionary movement. He was also associated with the Communist League and was asked to write a document (with Engels) expounding its aims and beliefs. The result was Marx's most famous work *The Communist Manifesto* published in 1848.
3. Marx and Engels began with the impression that everything in reality is a combination of opposites. An illustration of this point is that electricity is made up of a positive and negative charge. The essential idea is that this coming together

NOTES

of opposites in the natural world is the trait which makes every unit auto-dynamic in nature. It also ensures a non-stop drive for movement and transformation.

4. According to Lenin, the three axes are:
   (i) The materialistic invention of Hegelian dialectics
   (ii) The historicity of moral philosophy designed to class conflict
   (iii) The junction of 'laws of evolution' in physics (Helmholtz), biology (Darwin) and in political economics (Marx)

5. Marx differentiated the stages of human history on the basis of their economic regimes and categorized them into four modes of production which he called the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the bourgeois.

6. In this kind of society, though the slaves possessed some ownership over land, a major portion of the yield still went to the master. It was the inception of 'lordship society'. In this society, too, there were two conflicting classes — serfs and lords. Lords were superseded by kings or emperors. The serfs laboured and the lords or kings benefited. In order to give sanction to the authority of kings and lords, religion was resorted to.

7. Under capitalism, the nature of the product also changes, i.e., products become commodities — they not only have a use value, but an exchange value as well. In fact, under capitalism, products are produced especially as exchange goods, i.e., trade goods, which makes the use value of the product incidental to and separate from its value as a trade good. Thus for Marx, commodity production isolates the worker as a supplier of only commodity labour.

8. For Marx, bringing fulfilment and meaning to the lives of human beings is entirely dependent on the development and exercise of their essential human powers, whose focus is labour or production.

9. Marxists observe the 'pure' labour (positioned at the farthest left-hand region), whose societal position (every one of dissimilar intermediate forms) is not in any way at odds and in opposition to him, and he is by no means 'methodologically' advantaged; nor the 'pure' industrialist. Together they somewhat are viewed merely as forms fused together with each other in differently arranged multitude. Alternatively, the sociological observation takes care of the 'pure' labour in addition to the 'pure' industrialist like 'methodological pillars' suspended among the network of transitional classes.

10. The vital theme of the work was class struggle. In it they state that all history is the history of the class struggle: free men and slaves, patrigians and plebeians, barons and serfs, master artisans and journeymen.

11. Marx's account of alienation in capitalist society aims at substantiating three principal theses:
   - The vast majority of people living under capitalism are alienated.
   - The chief causes of this alienation cannot be removed so long as the capitalist mode of production prevails.
   - Alienation as a pervasive social phenomenon can and will be abolished in a post-capitalist (socialist or communist) mode of production.

12. Marx does believe that alienation can be overcome in a modern, complex and industrialized society. But he is not necessarily committed to denying that there might be causes of alienation other than those specifically identified by his theory. The main burden of Marx's message is that capitalist social relations are the most pervasive and obvious cause of alienation, which must be abolished first, before lesser or more hidden causes can be dealt with.

NOTES

3.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a brief biography of Karl Marx.
2. What was the basic difference between the mindsets of Engel and Marx?
3. What is dialectical materialism?
4. Which are Engel's three laws of dialectics?
5. What was the main subject of Marx's Communist Manifesto?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the criticism garnered by Marx's dialectical materialism.
2. Give a detailed assessment of Marx's conception of historical materialism.
3. Discuss Marx's explanation of feudalism.
4. How are capitalism and alienation related? Elaborate.
5. 'Marxian outlook of class portrays the person as a location of conflict.' Explain.

3.10 FURTHER READING

Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.

Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Boguardus, Emory S. 1969. *The Development of Social Theory*. Mumbai: Vakils, Feffa and Simons.

Jayapalan, J. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Ritzer, George. 1988. *Sociological Theory*, Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ritzer, George. 2007. *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Adams, Bert N., Rosalind Ann Sydie and R.A. Sydie. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Allan, Kenneth and Kenneth D. Allan. 2009. *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Calhoun, Craig J. 2002. *Classical Sociological Theory*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Edles, Laura and Desfor Scott Appelrouth. 2010. *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era: Text and Readings*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. 2007. *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. New York: Springer.

UNIT 4 EMILE DURKHEIM

NOTES

Structure

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Unit Objectives
4.2 Brief Biography
4.3 Division of Labour
4.4 Social Fact
4.5 Rules of Sociological Methods
4.6 Sociology of Religion
4.7 Theory of Suicide
4.8 Summary
4.9 Key Terms
4.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.11 Questions and Exercises
4.12 Further Reading

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Emile Durkheim offered a more coherent theory than any of the other sociological theorists. He articulated the concepts in a rather clear, theoretically oriented manner and used it in a variety of specific works. Supporters would say that the clarity in Durkheim's thinking stems from this coherence, whereas detractors might contend that the clarity is the result of the comparative simplicity of his theory. Whatever the case, it is certainly easier to realize the real essence of Durkheim's thinking than that of other classical theorists.

The heart of Durkheim's theory lies in his concept of social fact. Durkheim differentiated between the two basic types of social facts — material and nonmaterial. Although both of these occupied a place of causal priority in his theorizing, material social facts (for example, division of labour, dynamic density and law) were not the most important large-scale forces in Durkheim's theoretical system. His main focus was on non-material social facts. He dealt with a number of them, including collective conscience, collective representations and social currents.

Durkheim's study of suicide is a good illustration of the significance of non-material social facts in his work. In his basic causal model, changes in non-material social facts ultimately cause differences in suicide rates. Durkheim differentiated among four types of suicide — egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic — and showed how each is affected by different changes in social currents. The study of suicide was taken by Durkheim and his supporters as the evidence that sociology has a legitimate place in the social sciences. After all, it was argued, if sociology could explain an act like suicide as individualistic, then it certainly could be used to explain other, less individual aspects of social life.

In his later work, Durkheim focused on another aspect of culture, called 'religion'. In his analysis of primitive religion, Durkheim sought to show the roots of religion in the social structure of society. It is society that defines certain things as sacred and others as profane. Durkheim demonstrated the social sources of religion in his analysis of primitive totemism and its roots in all social structures of the clan. Furthermore, totemism

NOTES

was seen as a specific form of the collective conscience manifested in a primitive society. Its source, as well as the source of all collective products, lies in the process of collective effervescence. In the end, Durkheim argued that religion and society are one and the same — two manifestations of the same general process.

Since he identified society with God, and also because he deified society, Durkheim did not urge for a social revolution. Instead, he should be seen as a social reformer interested in improving the way the society functions. Whereas Marx saw irreconcilable differences between capitalist and workers, Durkheim believed that these groups could be united in occupational associations. He urged that these associations should be set up to restore collective morality in the modern world and to cope with some of the curable pathologies of the modern division of labour. However in the end, such narrow, structural reforms could not really come up with the broader cultural problem that plagues the modern world. Here, Durkheim invested some hope in the curious modern system of collective morality that he labelled as the 'cult of the individual'.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Provide a brief biography of Emile Durkheim
- Explain division of labour as given by Emile Durkheim
- Discuss social fact and rules of sociological methods as propounded by Emile Durkheim
- Examine the sociology of religion as conceptualized by Emile Durkheim
- Describe the theory of suicide given by Emile Durkheim

4.2 BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Emile Durkheim was born on 15 April, 1858 in Epinal, France. He was the descendent of a long line of rabbis, and himself studied to be a rabbi. However, by the time he was in his teens, he rejected his heritage and became an agnostic. From now onwards, his lifelong interest in religion was academic instead of theological. He was not satisfied with his religious training. The same was the case with his general education and its focus on literary and aesthetic matters.

He wanted schooling in scientific methods and in the moral principles required to direct the social life. He did not opt for a traditional academic career in philosophy, and instead, strived to acquire the scientific training for contributing to the moral guidance of society. Even though he was interested in scientific sociology, there were no specific fields of sociology at that time. So between 1882 and 1887, he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools.

His appetite for science was whetted further by a trip to Germany, where he was exposed to the scientific psychology being pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt. In the years immediately after his visit to Germany, Durkheim published a good deal of works, basing his concepts, in part, on his experience there. These publications helped him gain a position in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887. There Durkheim taught the first course in social science in a French university. This was a particularly impressive accomplishment because only a decade earlier, a furore had

NOTES

erupted in a French university by the mentioned Auguste Comte due to a student dissertation.

Durkheim's main responsibility, however, was the teaching of courses in education to school teachers, and his most important course was the area of moral education. His goal was to communicate a moral system to the educators who he hoped would then pass it to young people in an effort to help reverse the moral degeneration he saw around him in the French society.

The years that followed were characterized by a series of personal successes for Durkheim. In 1893, he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labour in Society*, as well as a thesis on Montesquieu. His major methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method* appeared in 1895, followed (in 1897) by his empirical application of those methods in the study *Suicide*. By 1896, he had become a full professor at Bordeaux. In 1902, he was called to the famous French university, the Sorbonne, and in 1906 he was named as 'the professor of the science of education', a title which was changed in 1913 to 'professor of the science of education and sociology'. His other famous work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Presently, Durkheim is most often thought of as a political conservative, and his influence within sociology certainly has been a conservative one. However, during his time, he was considered as a liberal. This was exemplified by the active public role he played in the defence of Alfred Dreyfus, and Jewish army captain whose court-martial for treason was felt by many to be anti-Semitic. Durkheim was deeply offended by the Dreyfus affair, particularly its anti- Semitism. However, Durkheim did not attribute this anti-Semitism to racism among the French people. Characteristically, he saw it as a symptom of the moral sickness confronting French society as a whole. He made the following remark:

> 'When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes; and those against whom public opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are in pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms me in this interpretation is the way in which the result of Dreyfus's trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy in the boulevards. People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause for public mourning. At least they knew whom to blame for the charge: economic troubles and moral distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled.'

Thus, Durkheim's interest in the Dreyfus affair stemmed from his deep and lifelong interest in morality and the moral crisis confronting modern society. To Durkheim, the answer to the Dreyfus affair and crises like it lay in ending the moral disorder in society. Since it could not be done quickly or easily, Durkheim suggested government efforts to show the public how it is being misled. He urged people to 'have the courage to proclaim aloud what they think, and to unite together in order to achieve victory in the struggle against public madness' (Lukes, 1972; p. 347).

'Durkheim's (1928/1962) interest in socialism is also taken as evidence against the idea that he was a conservative, but his kind of socialism was very different from the kind that an out of date hypotheses' (Lukes, 1972; 323). To Durkheim, socialism represented a movement aimed at the moral regeneration of society through scientific morality; and he was not interested in short-term political methods or the economic aspects of socialism. He did not see the proletariat as the salvation of society, and he

NOTES

was greatly opposed to agitation or violence. Socialism for Durkheim was very different from what we usually think of as socialism; it simply represented a system in which the moral principles discovered by scientific sociology were to be applied.'

Durkheim, as we will see throughout this unit, had a profound influence on the development of sociology, but his influence was not restricted to only that. Much of his impact on other fields came through the journal *L'Annee Sociologique*, which he founded in 1898. An intellectual circle arose around the journal with Durkheim at its centre. Through it, he and his ideas influenced such fields as anthropology, history, linguistics and — somewhat ironically, considering his early attacks on the field — psychology. Durkheim died on 15 November 1917, as a celebrated figure in French intellectual circles. However, it was not until over twenty years later, with the publication of Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), that his work became a significant influence on American sociology.

4.3 DIVISION OF LABOUR

The first major book of Durkheim, *De la division du travail social*, was also his doctoral thesis. He was deeply influenced by the theories of Auguste Comte. Not surprisingly, the relationship or link between the individual and the collective forms the theme of the book. Through this book, Durkheim wishes to find out, 'how can a multiplicity of individuals achieve what is the condition of social existence, namely a consensus?'

Durkheim's reply is that it is through the distinction between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. The main feature of 'mechanical solidarity' is resemblance. Durkheim feels that there is hardly any difference between individuals in a mechanical solidarity-based society. The members of this solidarity not only experience the same emotions, they also treasure the same values and consider the same things sacred. Therefore, they resemble each other.

On the other hand, organic solidarity, is characterized by consensus on the coherent unity of the collectivity, which takes place by expressing differentiation. Here, the individuals differ from each other, and this difference is the reason for the consensus. Durkheim calls the solidarity based on the differentiation of individuals, 'organic' solidarity because it compares living organisms. For instance, there is a vast difference between the heart and the lungs but both are essential for an organism to function properly.

Durkheim felt that in the two forms of solidarity, the societies called primitive during Durkheim's time are today those where mechanical solidarity is predominant. From the historical point of view, since the people of a tribe can be interchanged, the individual does not come first. It is Durkheim's belief that the consciousness attained by a person about himself is born of the historical development of the collective self. In primitive societies, individuals did not differ, everyone was the same. In each one's consciousness, collective feelings predominate in terms of number and intensity.

According to Durkheim, a segment resembles a social group wherein the individual is tightly and closely placed. This segment is not only locally situated but also relatively isolated, leading its own life. Mechanical solidarity of resemblance is the primary feature of the segment. It is not only self-sufficient but separated from the outside world with hardly any communication. Segmental organization is a contradiction of the phenomena of differentiation designated by the term 'organic solidarity'. In certain societies, it is possible for a segmental structure to exist, with an extremely advanced form of economic division of labour.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the name of Durkheim's French doctoral thesis?
2. Why was Durkheim considered a liberal in his times?

NOTES

In continuation of local autonomies, and in the force of custom, the idea of segmental structure is not recognized with the solidarity of resemblance. It only implies the power of tradition. The concept of segmental structure is not identified with solidarity of resemblance but implies the comparative segregation and self-sufficiency of a several elements. In other words, a full society is like a combination of several similar segments, under absolute rule or autocracy. You could actually imagine several tribes or regionally independent groups, under perhaps one powerful central authority, lacking the unity of resemblance of the segment being disturbed. It would be without the demarcation of function characteristic of organic solidarity operating on the level of the whole society.

It is very important to note here that Durkheim's division of labour differs from the concept of division of labour as defined by economists. The demarcation of occupations and multiplication of industrial activities stand for the social differentiation which took precedence according to Durkheim. The beginning of social differentiation signals the fall of mechanical solidarity and segmental structures.

Durkheim believed that collective consciousness is 'the body of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society'. These beliefs and sentiments have an existence of their own. However, the collective consciousness requiring an individual's sentiments and beliefs to continue, is logically separate from individual consciousness. The development of collective consciousness takes place according to its own set of rules and laws and is not merely the expression or the outcome of individual consciousness.

There are different levels of collective consciousness in different social orders. According to Durkheim, wherever societies are dominated by mechanical solidarity, the greater part of individual consciousness is adopted by the collective consciousness. In such situations, a major share of existence is governed by social imperatives and prohibitions. Durkheim suggested that these prohibitions and social imperatives should not be embraced by the members of a society based on mechanical solidarity, on their own or of their own accord. Instead, these are imposed on the majority. An individual gives in to such imperatives just as he would to a higher authority. The force of this collective consciousness coincides with its degree. In primitive societies, there exists resentment against crime as well as collective consciousness. Each act of social existence, such as religious rites, is characterized by a deep level of accuracy. The details of what ought to be done and thought, are imposed by the collective consciousness on individual members. On the contrary, Durkheim says that in societies characterized by the difference between individuals, more often than not, each individual is free to believe, to want and to act as he wishes. For Durkheim, organic solidarity probably meant a loosening of the hold that collective consciousness has on the sphere of existence; a reduction in collective reaction against the imposed prohibitions, and most of all, scope for individual analysis of social imperative.

You can comprehend Durkheim's suggestions with the following example. In a primitive society, the demands of justice will be determined accurately by collective sentiments. In societies characterized by division of labour, the demands for justice will be formulated by the collective consciousness in a general manner and only in a concept. In the first example, justice implies that a given person receives a given thing. In the second example, what justice demands is that each one receives his due. This 'due' comprises several probable things, which are not really free in the true sense of the word, nor are they unambiguously fixed.

NOTES

Durkheim proposed a thought which was the core of his entire sociology. For him, an individual is born of society, and not the other way round. The historical priority of societies in which the individuals resemble one another, are so to speak, lost in the whole, over societies whose members have acquired both awareness in their individuality and the capability to express it. Collectivist societies, societies in which each one resembles everyone else, come first in time. From this historical priority, there results a rationale of priority in the justification of social phenomena. The division of labour is seen by many as the gain made by individuals by dividing the task so as to increase the volume produced of the collectivity. However, this clarification as an understanding of individual behaviour is considered by Durkheim as a reversal of a true order. By believing that men divided work between themselves, and assigned each individual a task of his own so as to increase the collective output and its usefulness, one is presuming that each individual is different and also conscious of his difference before social differentiation. If Durkheim's historical idea is true, their awareness of individuality could not last before organic solidarity and the division of labour. Therefore, it is Durkheim's belief that the rational pursuit of increased output cannot offer an explanation for social differentiation, as this pursuit presumes that very social differentiation which it is expected to explain.

The outline of Durkheim's central idea, which he uses as a base to define sociology was the priority of the whole over the parts. He believed that the social entity was not reducible to the sum of its elements.

When he analysed the concept of division of labour, Durkheim found two prominent ideas (i) the historical priority of societies where individual consciousness is wholly outside itself, and the collectivity, and not the state of the collectivity by individual phenomena. (ii) The division of labour talked about by Durkheim is an arrangement of the society as a whole, which is expressed technically or economically as division of labour. If you wish to examine a social phenomenon in a scientific manner, you will have to study it without any bias, as an outsider. You must identify the technique that will help you not only recognize but also comprehend the states of awareness which are not apprehensible in a direct way. Durkheim investigates these expressions of the phenomena of consciousness in *De la division du travail social*, where he differentiates between repressive law and cooperative law. The former offers punishment to offenders and criminals. The latter, also known as restitutive law does not favour punishment for those violating social rules but promotes restoration of things to order when an offence has been committed. It promotes organization of cooperation among individuals.

According to Durkheim, in societies dominated by mechanical solidarity, repressive law represents collective consciousness. The very fact that it multiplies punishments, revels the force of widespread sentiments, their scope and their particularization. With the increasing strength of collective conscience, there is an increase in crimes too. For Durkheim, crime implies progression of a prohibition. In the sociological sense, a crime is merely an act, which the collective consciousness forbids or prohibits. It is immaterial that this act may appear to be innocent in the eyes of observers from different societies or centuries after the event. In a sociological study, there can only be an external definition of crime in terms of the condition of the collective consciousness of the concerned society. This is the prototype of the objective and therefore of the relativists' definition of crime. Sociologically, a person labelled as a criminal is not necessarily one who is guilty in relation to God or to our conception of justice. The criminal is merely the individual living in society but refusing to follow the rules or obey the laws. This makes the consideration of Socrates as a criminal rather just.

NOTES

Following the theory of crime, Durkheim went on to explain the theory of punishment. He rejected the classic explanations of punishment wherein the function of punishments is to check the guilty act and stop it from occurring again. It is Durkheim's belief that the point and meaning of punishment is not to scare. Instead, the rationale is to render satisfaction to the common consciousness. For Durkheim, an act committed by an individual member of the collective offends the collective consciousness, which needs to be compensated. The compensation comes in the form of punishment of the guilty, which satisfies the collective. Sociologically speaking, Durkheim's analysis of punishment could be considered rather accurate.

The second kind of law is the one Durkheim usually refers to as restitutive. The point is no longer to punish, but to re-establish the condition of things as it should have been in harmony with justice. A man who has not settled his debt must pay it. Nonetheless, this restitutive law, of which commercial law is an example, is not the only type of law characteristics of societies with organic solidarity. At any rate, we must understand restitutive law in a very broad sense whereby it includes all aspects of legislation aiming to bring upon cooperation among individuals, administrative law and constitutional law which belong to the same token to the group of cooperative legislation. They are less the expression of the sentiments common to a collectivity than the organization of regular and ordered co-existence among individuals who are already differentiated.

Modern society is not based on agreement any more than the division of labour is explained by the rational decision of individual to increase the common productivity by dividing the tasks among them. If modern society were a contractualist society, then it would explain in terms of individual behaviour, and it is exactly the opposite of what Durkheim desires to show. While opposing contractualists like Spencer, as well as the economists, Durkheim does not reject that in modern societies, an increasing responsibility is indeed played by contracts freely accomplished among individuals. However, this contractual agreement is a derivative of the arrangement of the society and a derivative of the state of the collective consciousness in the modern society. In order for an increasingly wider sphere to exist in which individuals may freely reach agreement between themselves, the society must first of all have a legal structure which authorizes free choice on the part of individuals. In other words, inter-individual contracts take place within a social background which is not determined by the persons themselves. It is the division of labour by differentiation which is the original condition for the existence of the sphere of agreement. Contracts are accomplished between individuals, but the order and set of laws according to which these agreements are concluded are determined by the legislation which in turn expresses the idea shared by the whole society of the just and the unjust, the permissible and the prohibited.

The society in which the organic type of solidarity exists is not defined by the replacement of agreement for community. Nor is the modern society defined by the substitution of the industrial type for the military type. Modern society is defined first and foremost by the phenomenon of social demarcation of which contractualism is the result. Now we must look for the reason of the phenomenon we are studying, the reason of the organic solidarity or of social differentiation seen as an arrangement, characteristic of modern societies. It is not a priori, and it may even be unsightly that one can indeed find the reason of the phenomenon which is not simple and isolable, but which is rather an aspect of the whole of society. Durkheim, however, wants to decide the reason of phenomenon through which he has examined the growth of the division of labour in modern societies.

NOTES

As we have seen, we are dealing here with a basically social phenomenon. When the phenomenon to be explained is essentially social, the reason, in harmony with the principal of homogeneity of cause and effect, also ought to be social. Thus, we do away with the individualist explanation. Curiously, Durkheim gets rid of an explanation which Comte had also considered as eliminated, i.e., the explanation whereby the vital factor in social growth was held to be boredom, or the effort to overcome or avoid boredom. He also discusses the search for happiness as an explanation, for, he says, nothing proves that men in modern societies are happier than men in archaic societies.

The division of labour cannot be explained by boredom or by the pursuit of happiness or by the increase of pleasure or by the wish to increase the productivity of collective labour. The division of collective labour, being a social phenomenon, can only be explained by another social phenomenon as a mixture of the quantity, the material density and moral density of the society.

The quantity of a society is simply the number of individuals belonging to a particular collectivity. However, only quantity is not the basis of social differentiation. In order for quantity — increase in number — to bring about differentiation, there must also be both material and moral density. Density in the material sense is the number of individuals on a particular ground surface.

Moral density, it seems, is approximately the intensity of communication between individuals, i.e., the intensity of interaction. The extra communication there is between individuals, the extra they work together, the extra trade or competition they have with one another, the greater the density together; and in this way, social differentiation will result.

Durkheim describes an idea made fashionable by Darwin in the second half of the nineteenth century — the fight for survival. Why does the growing amount of interaction between individuals, itself created by material density, produce social differentiation? This is so because the more individuals are trying to live together, the more intense the struggle for survival becomes. Social demarcation is, so to speak, the peaceful way out to the fight for survival. Instead of somebody getting eliminated so that others may survive, as in the animal kingdom, social differentiation enables a greater number of individuals to survive by differentiation. Each man ceases to be in rivalry with all, each man is only in opposition with a few of his fellows. Each man is in a position to inhabit his place, to play his role, to execute visuals once they are no longer alike but different, each contributing on his own unusual manner to the survival of all.

This type of explanation is in keeping with what Durkheim considered to be a tenet of the sociological method – the clarification of a social phenomenon by another social phenomenon, rather than the justification of a social phenomenon by individual phenomena.

Check Your Progress

3. According to Durkheim, what is mechanical solidarity?
4. How did Durkheim justify punishment for a crime?

4.4 SOCIAL FACT

Durkheim's sociology has a very sound foundation, based on definite epistemology. Durkheim was a French sociologist, whose efforts and intellect, throughout his career, were mainly directed at building a sociological science with a stable epistemological foundation. The two principles that can be clearly seen in Durkheim's sociology are as follows:

NOTES

(i) Sociology must be a science which has a methodology similar to the physical-natural sciences, that is, based on positivism.

(ii) The positivist science of society goes against philosophy and psychology. Durkheim considered the newly developed positivism of Auguste Comte, one of the founders of sociology, as a model of 'science'. Clearly he had a strong influence on Durkheim's sociology. Remember, Comte's thought favoured a positive progression of all the sciences whose last stage will be sociology (which he initially referred to as social physics). He called sociology the most sophisticated positive science, because its study integrated in humanity all the contributions made by earlier sciences.

Durkheim's assumption was that the science dealt with 'things' instead of 'ideas' or 'concepts'. Therefore, his initial point is generally the sensation, sensitive information and the exterior of things. In his own words,

> Since it is for the sensation for which is given us the exterior of the things, it therefore can be said in short: science, in order to be objective, it should start, not from concepts that have been formed without her, but from sensation. It is of the sensitive data of those that it should take the elements of its initial definitions directly.

This very positivism lead to the construction of Durkheim's most popular epistemological 'rules' (*regles*) — the rule that social facts (*faits*) should be considered as 'things'. The term 'thing' for Durkheim was purely realistic. He felt that 'It is a thing, indeed, all what is given, all what offers or, rather, it is imposed to the observation. To treat the phenomena like things, it is to treat them in quality of data that constitute the starting point of science.' Therefore, according to Durkheim, 'thing' has no 'material' meaning as may have been the usual connotation because sociology should be aimed at doing away with 'preconceived ideas'. Sociology should deviate from sociological idealism, away from the analysis of apriori ideas considered to be the starting point of research and according to which needs are required to be adjusted to reality. Although 'thing' was ambiguous, Durkheim was sure of its goals, which were as follows:

1. To ensure that sociology was objective and scientific and followed the positivist paradigm of the physical-natural sciences. Like physics and astronomy, sociology takes into consideration a limited number of facts, as the subject matter of study for its researchers. Therefore, it does not study illusions or speculations.
2. The word 'thing' becomes clear from the fact that the sociologist reaches a socially and historically constructed reality, which is imposed on people. The social reality is constructed, for sure, but becomes a concrete reality, which forces or restricts us. It is the real meaning of 'thing', that is, a social fact, which, despite being a creation of human beings, comes to them as a given and requires a sociologist to merely scrutinize, describe and explain it. From a methodological perspective, the most important thing Durkheim feels is that sociology, like other sciences, relies on 'observation'. Therefore, the social facts, or 'things', have a dual quality – 'They are external to the individual and have a coercive character over him.'

Durkheim aimed to preserve philosophy in secondary education, for which he wished philosophy could be a lot more than merely abstract literature (*littérature abstraite*). It wasn't enough for philosophy to be a mere rhetoric based on an artist's talent. He wanted philosophy to be a lot more scientific by diverging from deductions based on metaphysics. In fact, what guided his epistemology was the rejection of metaphysics,

NOTES

which would become clearer in the study of religion, denying the supernatural emphatically. He disagrees with philosophy so that sociology could stop being an ambiguous social philosophy aimed at rendering a positivist consistency to the study of social facts.

Being apprehensive about the ground of morality, Durkheim presumed a social reality which played an important role of being the moral ground like Kant who introduced God as the 'postulate of practical reason'.

The individual considers social facts to be not just external but also coercive because they are born from society, not from him or his authority. It originates as a *sui generis* reality. Although Durkheim does not deny that society is made up of people: 'truly, society has a 'substratum' in the form of individuals but is not reduced to them'. 'If it is possible to say, in certain way, that the collective representations are exterior to the individual consciences, it is because they do not derive from isolate individuals, but of his grouping; what is very different.' He uses the model of chemical synthesis to explain his thesis. This does not get reduced to the sum of its constituent elements but gives new properties to the parts or components that make it up.

Sociologism conflicts with Gabriel Tarde's views that limited sociology to the study of the individual consciences, and restricted collective behaviour to the social contagion through imitation. Durkheim wanted sociology to comprise proper subject matter, which was not the same as psychology. He introduced his theory of society as *sui generis* reality. Therefore, he was the creator of the social facts which sociology studies.

4.5 RULES OF SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

It is probable that man has always classified, more or less clearly, the things on which he lived, according to the means he used to get them; for example, animals living in the water, or in the air or on the ground. But at first, such groups were not connected with each other or systematized. They were divisions, and distinctions of ideas, not schemes of classification. Moreover, it is evident that these distinctions are closely linked to practical concerns, of which they merely express certain aspects. The Australians do not classify the universe between the totems of his tribe with a view to regulate his conduct or even to justify his practice. It is because of the idea of the totem being fundamental for him that he is under an obligation to place everything else that he knows in relation to it.

Therefore, we may think that the conditions on which these very ancient classifications are based may have played a key role in the origin of the classificatory function in general.

It is very simple to analyse how these classifications were modelled on the closest and the most basic form of social organization. However, it is not going far enough. Society was not just a model followed by the classificatory thought. It comprised its own divisions that served as divisions for the classification system. Social categories were the first logical categories; classes of men were the first classes of things into which these things were integrated. It happened because men grouped and identified themselves in the form of groups. Further, in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning, the two means of grouping were merged to the point of becoming indistinguishable. Moieties were the first genera — clans, the first species. Things were supposed to be essential parts of society, and their place in society determined their place in nature. One may even wonder whether the schematic manner in which genera are usually conceived

NOTES

may not have depended in part on the same influences. It is definitely not without cause that concepts and their interrelations have so usually been represented by concentric and eccentric circles, interior and exterior to each other, etc.

Not just the external forms of classes, but also the relations uniting them among themselves possess social origin. Since human groups fit one into another — the sub-clan into the moiety, the moiety into the tribe — hence, the groups of things are ordered in the similar manner. Their regular reduction in span, from genus to species, species to variety, and so forth, stems from the equally diminishing extent presented by social groups as one leaves the largest and oldest, and reaches the more recent and the more derivative. If the totality of things is viewed as a single system, it is because the society itself is viewed in a similar manner. It is a whole; or rather it is the exclusive whole to which everything is related. Hence, logical hierarchy is just another aspect of social hierarchy, and the unity of knowledge is nothing more than the very unity of the collectivity, enlarged to the universe.

Additionally, the ties that unite the things within a group or different groups to each other are themselves viewed as social ties. The expressions by which we refer to these relations still possess a moral implication; but whereas for us they are barely more than metaphors, initially they meant what they stood for.

Things belonging to the same class were actually taken as relatives of the individuals of the same social groups, and hence, as a result, of each other. They are of the same flesh and the same family. Thus, logical relations are, in a sense, domestic relations. Sometimes, they can be compared at all points with the one existing between a master and an object possessed, and between a chief and his subjects. One may even wonder whether the idea of the pre-eminence of genus over species, so strange from a positivistic view point, may not be conceived here in its rudimentary form. Among the Zuni, the animals symbolizing the six main clans are set in sovereign charge over their respective sub-clans and over creatures of all kinds that are grouped with them.

But if the foregoing has allowed us to understand how the notion of classes, linked to each other in a single system, could have been born; we still do not know what the forces were which induced men to divide things as they did between the classes. From the fact that the external form of classification was furnished by society, it does not necessarily follow that the way in which the framework was used is due to reasons of the same origin. A priori, it is very possible that motives of a quite different order should have determined the way in which things were connected and merged, or else, on the contrary, in which things were distinguished and opposed.

All types of affective elements unite in the representation made of it. Religious emotions, particularly, not just give it a unique trace, but provide it the most basic properties it is constituted of. Above all, things are sacred or profane, pure or impure, favourable or unfavourable, i.e., their most elemental characteristics are just expressions of the manner in which they influence the social sensibility. The differences and similarities that determine the fashion in which they are grouped are more effective than intellectual.

It has usually been stated that man began to consider things by relating them to himself. It enables us to see more accurately what this anthropocentrism, which may better be termed as socio-centrism, consists of. The individual is not the centre of the first schemes of nature; rather, it is the society. It is this which gets objectified, not man. Nothing proves this more noticeably than the manner in which the Sioux retain the whole universe, in a way, within the limits of tribal space. Also, we have seen how universal space itself is nothing else than the site occupied by the tribe, only indefinitely extended

NOTES

beyond its real limits. By the virtue of the same mental disposition, so many people have placed the centre of the world, 'the navel of the earth', in their own political or religious capital, i.e., at the place which is the centre of their moral life. Similarly, but in another order of ideas, the creative force of the universe and everything in it was initially conceived as a mythical ancestor, the generator of the society.

The classification of concepts is logical. Now a concept is the notion of a clearly determined group of things; its limits may be marked precisely. Emotion, on the contrary, is something essentially fluid and inconsistent. Its contagious influence spreads far beyond its point of origin, extending to everything about it, so that it is not possible to say where its power of propagation ends. The states of an emotional nature necessarily possess the same characteristic. It is not possible to say where they begin or where they end. They lose themselves in each other, and mingle their properties in such a way that they cannot be rigorously categorized. The pressure put forward by the group on all its members does not allow the individuals to freely evaluate the notions which society itself has elaborated, and in which it has placed something of its personality. These constructs are sacred for the individuals. So, the history of scientific classification is, in the final analysis, the history of the stages by which this element of social affectivity has progressively weakened, giving more and more room to the individuals for reflective thought. However, it is not the case that these distant influences which we have just studied have ceased to be felt presently. They have left behind them an effect that is surviving; it is the very cadre of all classification. It is the assembly of mental habits by virtue of which we envisage things and facts in the form of coordinated or hierarchical groups.

4.6 SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

The following are the characteristics of the modern society:

(i) Organic solidarity

(ii) Social differentiation

(iii) Density of population

(iv) Intensity of communication

(v) Struggle for survival

These are not to be regarded as abnormal because they are all related to the essence of modern society. Modern societies at times show pathological symptoms and insufficient integration of the individual into the collective. This type of anomic suicide, according to Durkheim, corresponds to a rise in the suicide rate during times of economic crisis as well as in times of prosperity, i.e., when activity is exaggerated, intercourse and competition are amplified. These are inseparable from the society we belong to or live in, but which become pathological after certain limits.

Check Your Progress

5. What were Durkheim's views regarding philosophy?
6. How is emotion explained by Durkheim?

Durkheim believes that religion does not help to solve the issue of anomic suicides. Religion is incapable of providing remedies for curing the pathological type of suicide. What Durkheim thought was the basic demand for the group for reintegration was discipline. Individuals are required to control their desires, obey rules and imperatives that not only fix the objectives they set for themselves but also indicate the means to be used rightly. In modern societies, not only are religions becoming more abstract but also possess a level of intellectual quality.

NOTES

Even though they have lost their function of social constraint to some extent, they encourage individuals to overcome their passions, to follow spiritual law, but they are incapable of pointing out the rules to be obeyed in secular life. According to Durkheim, modern religions are now incapable of ensuring discipline to the same degree as in the past. They hardly possess any authority over morals. It is Durkheim's belief that, if left to himself, man has unlimited desires to motivate him. Usually, an individual has infinite desires, but the first necessity of morality and of society is discipline. Man requires to be disciplined by a superior force possessing the following features:

(i) It has to be commanding

(ii) It has to be lovable

According to Durkheim, this force, which not only compels but also attracts can come only from the society. A general theory of religion can be derived by analysing the simplest and most primitive religious institutions. This statement provides Durkheim's leading idea, that is, it is possible to legitimately base the valid theory of higher religious values on a study of the primitive forms of religion.

Durkheim felt that science is the supreme intellectual and moral authority in modern day societies, and that societies are not only individualist but also rationalist. Though it is possible to transcend science, it is impossible to ignore its teaching or challenges. Society itself determines and supports the growth of individualism and nationalism. All societies need common beliefs, which can no longer be provided by traditional religion because religion does not fulfil the needs of the scientific spirit. The simple solution given by Durkheim is that science itself is capable of disclosing that all said and done, deep down, religion is not in contradiction to science. His suggestion is to discover reality that lies beneath all religions. Though religion is not a recreation of science, it is capable of providing us the confidence in the ability of the society to offer itself in every age with the goods it requires. Durkheim expresses this as follows – 'Religious interests are merely the symbolic form of social and moral interests.' Religion essentially divides the world into two kinds of phenomena:

(i) Sacred

(ii) Profane

Religion, therefore, is not limited to the belief in a transcendent god. Religions exist without god, for example, the Buddhists believe that the idea of the supernatural cannot precede the idea of a natural order. The sacred comprises a body of rituals, customs, rites, things and beliefs. Religion comprises the body of corresponding beliefs and rites, when several sacred things maintain relations of coordination and subordination with one another so as to form a similar system.

Durkheim defines religion as follows – 'A religion is an interdependent system of beliefs and practices regarding things which are sacred, that is to say, apart, forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite all those who follow them in a single moral community called a church.'

The next step of the study does away with interpretations that contradict Durkheim's. Interpretations stated in his book are animism and naturism. As per animism, religious beliefs are considered to be held within spirits. These spirits are the transfiguration of the experience men have about their two-fold nature of body and soul. Naturism implies human beings worshipping transfigured natural forces. Durkheim says that religion would indicate a kind of collective hallucination either to love spirits whose unreality he/she affirms, or to love natural forces transfigured merely by the means of fear.

NOTES

Durkheim aims to establish the reality of the object of faith without accepting the intellectual object of faith and the intellectual content of traditional religions. In his eyes, the development of scientific nationalism has doomed traditional religions. However, he feels it will protect whatever it seems to be destroying by showing that in the last analysis, men worshipped only their society, nothing beyond or other than that.

Durkheim refers to Tylor's theory, which began with the phenomena of the dream. Dreams make people see themselves in places where they are actually not. They kind of see their own doubles. It is rather convenient for people to imagine this. Following death, this double also gets detached to become a floating spirit, either a good one or a bad genus. As per this interpretation, early humans beings found it difficult to differentiate between the animate and the inanimate. Durkheim refuted by taking up the elements of this interpretation one at a time. Why should one consider the dream so important? If we assume that not everyone conceives a double, why is this double considered sacred? Why is it considered to be an extraordinary import? According to Durkheim, ancestor worship is not a primitive cult. Also, it is not correct that primitive cults were particularly addressed to the dead — the cult of the dead.

Having declared the fundamental nature of religion as sacred, Durkheim has no difficulty in expressing the weaknesses of the animist explanation. This explanation may throw light on the world of spirits. However, in Durkheim's eyes the world of spirits is not sacred.

Durkheim regards that the science of religions presupposes the unreality of the transcendent as a subject of principle. The transcendent, being mystical, is automatically done away with by the scientific method. Therefore, the challenge is to rediscover the reality of a religion after abolishing the supernatural from it. A significant idea in Durkheim's thought is that of totemism being the simplest religion. This implies an evolutionist origin of religious history. In the perspective of a non-evolutionist viewpoint, totemism would be one religion among others — one simple religion among others. If Durkheim asserts that it is the simplest, most elementary religion, he is implicitly acknowledging that religion has a progression from a single origin.

This simple religion comprised 'clan and totem'. The clan refers to a kindred group not based on the ties of consanguinity. It is a human group with its identity coming from the connection established with a plant or animal, with a genus or type of plant or animal. The transmission of the totem recognized with the clan is effectuated in a variety of ways. The most common way of transmission is through the mother, but it is not a case of absolute regularity or of law. There are clan totems, but there are also individual totems and totems of more widespread groups like matrimonial classes.

Every totem possess its emblem, also called blazon. Each clan has an object, such as a piece of wood or even polished stones, on which the totem is symbolically represented. Ordinary objects, called *churinga*, are transfigured the moment they carry the emblem of the totem. They also get infused by the holy quality associated with the totem. In modern societies, the flag is the equivalent of the *churinga* of the Australians. The flag of a collectivity is considered sacred as far as the native land is concerned. It is the equivalent of certain phenomena studied by Durkheim. Totemic things, or objects carrying the symbol or emblem of the totem, result in behaviour distinctive of the religious order, i.e., either the practice of non-participation or positive practices. The clan members should avoid eating or touching the totem or the objects possessing similar holy quality of the totem. They must exhibit several ways of respect with regard to the totem. A sphere of holy comprises:

NOTES

(i) The very plants or animals which are totem

(ii) The items bearing the representation of the totem

Eventually, the revered quality is conveyed to individuals. Holy things include plants, animals, their representations, individuals connected to these sacred objects through clan involvement. This realm of sacred things is prepared in a methodical manner. There are profane things towards which people behave in an economic manner as economic activities are considered the model of profane action itself.

Durkheim does not believe that totemism descends from ancestor worship. According to him, primitive phenomenon manifests itself in animal worship, placing individual totemism as anterior to clan totemism. He does not accept interpretations according to which local totemism, i.e., the attribution of a totem to a fixed locality, is the basic phenomenon. That is, for him, historically and logically, the totemism of the clan.

According to him, what the Australians refer to as external to profane things is primarily an anonymous, impersonal force which is personified randomly in a plant, an animal or the representation of any of those. All worship and belief is directed towards this impersonal and anonymous force.

Durkheim feels that society supports the rise of values because persons, brought together and living in communication with one another, are capable of making the divine create a religion through the exaltation of festivals.

Durkheim alludes to the revolutionary cult. On the occasion of the French Revolution, individuals were also seized with a kind of sacred eagerness. The terms 'nation', 'liberty' and 'revolution' were charged with a blessed value. Such periods of turmoil are favourable to the collective exaltations which produce the sacred. Durkheim admits that the exaltation during the French Revolution was insufficient to give rise to a new religion. But, he believed that other turmoil will arise and there will be a moment when modern societies will again be gripped by the sacred passion, from which new religions will originate.

Thus, the sociological understanding of religion takes two forms. One of these is expressed by the following plan–

In totemism, human beings worship their own society even without understanding it. Holiness is first connected to the collective and impersonal force which symbolizes the society. The second version of the theory believes that societies are discarded to give rise to gods or religions when they are in an exalted state. This takes place when society progresses in direction to strengthen itself. In Australian tribes, this exaltation takes place in the form of rituals, that exist even today.

Religion comprises a collection of beliefs, expressed orally and taking on the form of a system of thought. Durkheim emphasized the importance of two kinds of social phenomena:

(i) Symbols

(ii) Rites

A lot of social behaviour is addressed not merely to objects but also to their symbols. Human beings address their social behaviour to these objects/ things themselves, as well as their symbols. Durkheim proposes a detailed theory of rites where he differentiates between the types of rites and their functions. He states three kinds of rites–

1. Negative rites
2. Positive rites
3. Odd rites or rites of compensation

NOTES

Negative rites are interdicts such as prohibition of eating or touching. They develop in the direction of all religious practices of asceticism. Positive rites, on the other hand, are rites of communion aimed at promoting procreation or reproduction. Durkheim examines the mimetic or representative rites, which attempt to emulate the things one wishes to bring about.

These negative, positive or peculiar rites all have the primary purpose of establishing a social order. They are aimed at supporting the community, renewing the sense of belonging to the group, sustaining belief and faith, etc. A religion continues to exist only by practices which are both symbols of the belief and the traditions of renewing them.

Durkheim tries to understand the religious attitude and practices of the Australian tribes as well as the habits of thinking related to these beliefs. He develops a sociological theory of knowledge by examining Australian totemism. For him, religion is the centre from which not ethical and religious rules originate through differentiation. It is also the point of birth of scientific thought. Therefore, it can be concluded that Durkheim considered religion to be the most significant institution of society, which formed the foundation for other social forms. This is so because religion knits humanity through collective consciousness. He believed that religion was born in the early human societies due to an inclination to relate collective emotions with an intangible force. With time, emotions came to symbolize something and interactions were transformed into rituals giving way to organized religion. As a result, there was a distinction the sacred and the profane. However, religion was eventually eclipsed by other social facts, and science and individualism began to have more relevance than religion. So, even when we see that religion no longer has the same hold over people's lives, it must be noted that it is religion that is fundamental to the society's existence, and that has made social interactions possible. Though other forces have come into existence, still religion cannot be replaced with any of these forces. Durkheim is sceptical about the advent of modernity and considers it as 'a period of transition and moral mediocrity'.

Durkheim claimed that if we wish to understand the society, we must first try to understand how their origin is related to religion. For him, religion begot other social forms. Durkheim opined that it is the society that creates categories, and he refers to these categories as collective creations. So, as societies form, categories are formed too; but it is not done consciously. These categories precede individual experiences. It was along these lines that Durkheim tried to bridge the gap between seeing categories as constructed out of human experience and as logically prior to that experience. We understand the world by understanding social facts; for instance, we chiefly use calendar to measure time, but calendar was invented to keep track of our social gatherings and rituals; and these rituals have their origin in religion itself. Durkheim suggested that even science has its roots in religion. Durkheim remarks that 'religion gave birth to all that is essential in the society'.

Check Your Progress

7. As per Durkheim, what is characteristic of modern religions?
8. What is animism?
9. What are negative rites as per Durkheim?

4.7 THEORY OF SUICIDE

Durkheim's best known book is about his study of suicide. His aim in this book was not only to provide an account of suicide, but also to illustrate how his methodology could be applied to even the most individual of acts. Durkheim in this book showed as to what extent the individual actions are determined by the collective reality. Durkheim demonstrated that the taking of one's life, apparently the most individual and personal of acts, was socially patterned. He showed that social forces existing outside the individual shaped the likelihood that a person would commit suicide.

NOTES

We can define suicide as a positive or negative act performed by the victim himself and which strives to produce a result directly or indirectly in the form of death. An example of a 'positive act' would be to shoot oneself in the temple or to hang oneself. And an example to show that suicide is committed in a negative act would be to remain in a burning building or to refuse all nourishment so as to starve oneself to death. According to Durkheim's definition, we can also take an example of a hunger strike carried out until death as suicide. The distinction between directly and indirectly corresponds to the comparison between positive and negative. Death is produced directly if a gunshot is put in the temple; but if someone refuses to eat anything or if someone deliberately stays in a burning building, then these negative acts would bring about the desired result, i.e., death, indirectly or in the near future.

The study of suicide deals both with a pathological aspect of the modern societies and with a phenomenon illuminating in the most striking way the relation of the individual to the collectivity. Individuals are determined by the collective reality as anxiously shown by Durkheim. An extraordinary force is now being related to this phenomenon of suicide, since the fact of taking one's own life is considered to be most supremely individual. According to Durkheim, if he found out that the society is governed by this phenomenon, then he would have proved it with the truth of his own thesis by the very case unfavourable to it. Durkheim says that it is the society which governs the solitary act of a desperate individual who wants to end his life at any cost. The concept of suicide is not only recognized as such, but taking an example of an officer who lets himself be blown up rather than surrender can be considered as a suicide. Suicide can be regarded as an instance of voluntary death surrounded by glory and the aura of heroism.

The suicide rate is relatively constant when its frequency is studied in a given population. And this characteristic can be found in a region, or a province, or a whole society. According to Durkheim's analysis, suicide rate can be termed as a social phenomenon. The distinction between relation of the social phenomenon (the suicide rates) and the individual phenomenon (suicide) is the most important thing from the point of view of theory.

Psychological explanation is dismissed by Durkheim. However, he says that there is psychological predisposition to suicide, and this predisposition can be explained in psychological or psychopathological terms. Individuals suffering from brain disorders are more likely to kill themselves under certain given circumstances. Nonetheless, it is the social force that determines the suicide, not psychological forces as said by Durkheim. The distinction must be considered carefully between social determination and psychological predisposition. The scientific discussion will focus on these two terms.

To prove the formula of psychological predisposition and sociological determination, classical method of concomitant variations is used by Durkheim. He also tries to prove that there is no correlation between the frequencies of psychopathological states and that of suicides, and he also examines certain variations in the suicide rate in different populations. No correlation is found between the hereditary tendencies and the suicide rate. The hypothesis that the efficient cause of suicide is transmitted by heredity can hardly be compared with the increase in the percentage of suicides with age. Interpretation of cases of suicide in the same family can be denied in this way. Nonetheless, a predisposition to suicide may be transmitted by heredity as cases of multiple suicides in the same family were observed. However, Durkheim dismisses both the hypotheses and the interpretation of suicide as deriving from the phenomenon of imitation. The keystone of the social order was considered to be an imitation as viewed by Gabriel Tarde. The term imitation consists of three confusing phenomena. Firstly, the mutual sentiments experienced by a large number of people would be called the fusion of consciousness.

NOTES

Revolutionary mob can be cited as the typical example of this. The identities of the consciousness of individuals tend to lose in the revolutionary mob: the emotions felt are same for each one as the next; mutual sentiments are stirred into the individuals.

Passion, acts and beliefs belong to each because they belong to all. Collectivity itself is the basis of the phenomenon and not one or more individuals. However, there isn't the true fusion of consciousness, as the individual often adapts himself to the collectivity, and he behaves like others. The individual wishes simply not to be conspicuous, and he yields to social imperatives which are more or less diffused, watered-down form of social imperative that can be taken as fashion. If a person wore a different dress other than what fashion required for that particular season, then he would feel devaluated and humiliated.

So, in this case we found that there was submission of the individual to the collective rule instead of imitation. So, finally we can say that the designation imitation is the only strict value in the sense 'and act which has for its immediate antecedent the representation of a similar act, previously performed by another, without the intervention, between representation and execution, of any explicit or implicit intellectual operation relating to the intrinsic character of the act performed'.

Contagion and epidemic are taken by Durkheim as two phenomena. This distinction is quite useful. Firstly contagion should be called an inter-individual one, or even an individual phenomenon. This type of phenomenon proceeds from one individual to another. However, as in the case of an epidemic, there is something else besides the process of contagion that comes into play. The epidemic is a collective phenomenon whose basis is the whole of the society but it may be transmitted by contagion.

The phenomenon of imitation is the determining factor in the conception of the suicide rates, as statically analysed by Durkheim. The process of refutation is as follows. According to the process, if we consider suicide to be contagion, then we would be able to see the geographical distribution of suicide as shown by areas that showed particularly high cases and where the suicide rate is higher and was spreading to other regions. But nothing of this sort is shown in the analyses on the geographical maps of suicide. The region where the suicide rate is particularly low appears next to the region where the suicide rate is particularly high. So, the hypothesis of contagion is thereby incompatible with the irregular distribution of suicide rates. But in certain cases, contagion may come into play.

According to Durkheim, incomplete and partial statistics dealing with only a small number are taken by him as the suicide statistics. Every year the suicide rate varies from one hundred to three hundred. It is important to have an idea of the magnitude of these figures. For sceptical reasons, the doctors have maintained that the study of variations in the suicide rate is almost of no consequence in view of the small numbers considered as well as the possible inaccuracies in the statistics. With a certain number of circumstances, the suicide rate varies as observed by Durkheim, which he then takes into consideration. The statistical correlations can determine the social types of suicides, as believed by him. There are three types of suicides that Durkheim has defined–

1. Egoist suicide
2. Altruist suicide
3. Anomic suicide

The correlation between the suicide rate and integrating social context like family and religion, is the double form of marriage and children and results in the first type of suicide, i.e., egoist suicide. Generally speaking, the suicide rates vary with age. It is

NOTES

found to be higher in men than in women, and it also increases with age. According to Durkheim's German statistics, he analysed that the suicide rates also vary with religion. He established that the frequency of suicides in the population of Catholic religion is less than that the number of suicides in the population of Protestant religion. Further, Durkheim compares the situation between the single or widowed men and women, and that of married men and women. Simple statistical methods are used to establish these comparisons.

The frequency of suicides in married and single men of the same age is compared in order to establish the coefficient of preservation, as called by Durkheim. As a result of marriage, there is reduction in the frequency of suicide at a given age. Similarly, for single or married women, for widows and widowers, he establishes the coefficient of preservation or coefficient of aggravation. According to certain statistics, married women suffer with a coefficient of aggravation; if they are childless, they will not enjoy the coefficient of preservation. And to give it an exact name, today's psychologists have been able to label this type of situation in women as frustration about not having a child. In such cases, the disproportion between expectation and fulfillment is too great.

Egoist men and women are those who think primarily of themselves, especially when they are not integrated into a social group, and when the desires that motivate them are not limited to the measure compatible with human destiny by the social authority of the group. Such persons commit suicide more often than others when they come across these situations. The second type of suicide is the 'altruist suicide'. There are two principle examples given in Durkheim's book. The first example is required by the collectivity, which is observed in ancient societies; that is, after the death of her husband the widow who agrees takes her place on the pyre to be burned alive with her dead husband.

In this example, the suicide that is attempted is through the complete disappearance of the individual into group, and the suicide does not take place because of an excess of individualism. The individual does not even think of asserting his right to live, but instead chooses death in conformity with social imperatives.

Similarity, altruist suicide can be said to be committed by the captain of the ship who chooses not to survive its loss. The individual suppresses his own instinct of self-preservation. He obeys the orders of the group to sacrifice himself to the internalized social imperatives. Taking an example of modern times, we can look at the increase in the number of suicide rates in the professional body, the army Suicide is committed a little more often by the soldiers than the civilians of the same age and class. Soldiers especially who are non-commissioned officers, or who belong to a strongly integrated group who commit suicide do not come into the category of the egoist suicide. Here, commissioned officers are listed because enlisted men may regard their military status as temporary, and they may combine obedience with a very great liberty in their evaluation of the system. The final major form of suicide discussed by Durkheim is anomic suicide which interests him the most because of its characteristics of the modern day society. The statistical correlation between the frequency of suicide and economic crisis can be indicated by this type of anomic suicide. A tendency in periods of economic crisis is indicated by the statistics. According to the statistical numbers, one can find a reduction in the frequency of suicides in the times of great political events. For example, the number of suicides during war time is smaller.

During the economic crisis, the frequency of anomic suicide increases; and also with the rise in divorce rates the frequency of suicides goes up. The influence of divorce on both men and women with regard to the frequency of suicide is studied extensively

NOTES

by Durkheim. The divorced woman is less likely to be threatened by suicide as compared to divorced man who is more likely to be threatened by suicide. Because of the tolerance of custom, man retains a certain freedom and finds equilibrium and discipline in marriage. Women, on the other hand, were more apt to find discipline than freedom in marriage as it was written by Durkheim in a previous article. After divorce the man returns to indiscipline, to the disparity between desires and satisfaction. On the other hand, woman after divorce feels more free and independent, and this partly compensates for the loss of familial protection. There is endless competition among individuals as the social existence is not ruled by customs anymore. The expectations in life are high, and also there is a great deal of demand from it. The disproportion between the desires and satisfaction is found to be in a continual rising mode leading to more sufferings at the mental and physical levels. Therefore, the suicidogenic impulse is on the rise. It is the result of restlessness and dissatisfaction prevailing in the atmosphere.

There is also the fourth type of suicide which is mentioned briefly as a footnote in Durkheim's work. This type of suicide is fatalistic suicide. Anomic suicide is more likely to occur in situations in which regulations are too weak, whereas fatalistic suicide is more likely to occur in situations in which there is excessive regulation. According to Durkheim, the persons who are more likely to commit fatalistic suicide are the 'persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently chocked by oppressive discipline' (1897/1951:276). The perfect example for this type of suicide will be of a slave who takes his own life because of the hopelessness related to the oppressive regulations of his actions.

The causes of suicide are essentially social even if it is an individual phenomenon. There are social forces, 'suicidogenic impulses', occurring through society whose beginning is not from the individual but the collectivity. These forces are real and the determining cause of suicide. Of course, says Durkheim, these 'suicidogenic impulses' are not present in any human being taken at random. If a human being commits suicide, it is in all probability because he was likely to behave in a particular way by his psychological make-up, nervous weakness or neurotic imbalance. The psychological predispositions are created by the 'suicidogenic impulses' which are the creation of social circumstances, because human beings living in the modern society have a great risk of hurting their sensibilities.

The true causes are the social forces. These social forces differ from one another; from one religion to another; and from one group to another. This gets us back to the main concept of Durkheim society, according to which the societies are by nature heterogeneous in relation to individuals; that there are phenomena forces, whose foundation is the collectivity and not the totality of the individuals. Phenomena or forces which can be explained only when taken as a whole were generated by the individuals together. Therefore, we can say that individual phenomena are governed specially by social phenomena; each person believing that he is obeying himself to end his life is the most impressive example of the social forces which motivate individuals to their deaths.

Check Your Progress

10. What are negative and positive suicides?
11. How is suicide related to psychology of individual?
12. Name the three types of suicide that Durkheim has defined.

4.8 SUMMARY

- The heart of Durkheim's theory lies in his concept of social fact. Durkheim differentiated between two basic types of social facts—material and nonmaterial.
- Durkheim's study of suicide is a good illustration of the significance of non-material social facts in his work. In his basic causal model, changes in non-material social facts ultimately cause differences in suicide rates. Durkheim differentiated among four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic—and showed how each is affected by different changes in social currents.
- Durkheim was deeply offended by the Dreyfus affair, particularly its anti-Semitism. However, Durkheim did not attribute this anti-Semitism to racism among the French people.
- The basic feature of Durkheim's sociology is its steady foundation in a very substantial and definite epistemology. Actually, the intellectual career of the French sociologist was highlighted by the incessant effort to build a sociological science with a solid epistemological foundation (in fact, the epistemological concerns form the core of his research interests).
- The first major book of Durkheim was *De la division du travail social*, which was his doctoral thesis also and was highly influenced by Auguste Comte. The relation between individuals and the collective is the theme of this book which seeks to know 'how can a multiplicity of individuals achieve what is the condition of social existence namely a consensus?'
- Durkheim's best known book is his study of suicide. His aim in this book was not only to provide an account of suicide but also to illustrate how his methodology could be applied to even the most individual of acts. Durkheim in this book showed that to what extent the individuals are determined by the collective reality.
- The various characteristics of modern society are social differentiation, organic solidarity, density of population, intensity of communications and the struggle for survival. All these phenomena should not be regarded as abnormal as they are related to the essence of modern society.
- All sophisticated classifications are systems of hierarchized notions. Things are not simply arranged by themselves in the form of isolated groups, but these groups stand in fixed relationships to each other and together form a single whole. Moreover, these systems, like those of science, have a purely speculative purpose.

NOTES

4.9 KEY TERMS

- **Totemism:** A belief in totems or in kinship through common affiliation to a totem
- **Rabbi:** A person trained in Jewish law, ritual, and tradition and ordained for leadership of a Jewish congregation, especially one serving as chief religious official of a synagogue
- **Agnostic:** One who believes that it is impossible to know whether there is a God
- **Degeneration:** The process of degenerating
- **Court-martial:** A military or naval court of officers appointed by a commander to try persons for offences under military law
- **Treason:** Violation of allegiance toward one's country or sovereign, especially the betrayal of one's country by waging war against it or by consciously and purposely acting to aid its enemies
- **Racism:** The belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others
- **Proletariat:** The class of industrial wage earners who, possessing neither capital nor production means, must earn their living by selling their labour
- **Anthropology:** The scientific study of the origin, the behaviour, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans

NOTES

- **Epistemology:** The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity
- **Positivism:** A doctrine contending that sense perceptions are the only admissible basis of human knowledge and precise thought
- **Social differentiation:** The division of a social unit or its parts into interrelated elements
- **Prototype:** An original type, form, or instance serving as a basis or standard for later stages
- **Contractualism:** Any of various theories that justify moral principles or political arrangements by appealing to a social contract that is voluntarily committed to under ideal conditions for such commitment
- **Tenet:** An opinion, doctrine, or principle held as being true by a person or especially by an organization
- **Rite:** The prescribed or customary form for conducting a religious or other solemn ceremony
- **Animism:** The belief in the existence of individual spirits that inhabit natural objects and phenomena
- **Naturism:** The worship of nature or natural objects
- **Consanguinity:** Relationship by blood or by a common ancestor
- **Blazon:** A coat of arms
- **Churinga:** A sacred amulet of the native Australians
- **Asceticism:** The principles and practices of an ascetic; extreme self-denial and austerity
- **Fecundity:** The quality or power of producing abundantly; fruitfulness or fertility
- **Moiety:** Either of two kinship groups based on unilateral descent that together make up a tribe or society
- **Genera:** Plural of genus
- **Anthropocentrism:** An inclination to evaluate reality exclusively in terms of human values
- **Socio-centrism:** The tendency to believe that one's ethnic or cultural group is centrally important, and that all other groups are measured in relation to one's own

4.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. In 1893, he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labour in Society*, as well as a thesis on Montesquieu.
2. This was because of the active public role he played in the defence of Alfred Dreyfus, and Jewish army captain whose court-martial for treason was felt by many to be anti-Semitic. Durkheim was deeply offended by the Dreyfus affair, particularly its anti- Semitism. However, Durkheim did not attribute this anti-Semitism to racism among the French people. Characteristically, he saw it as a symptom of the moral sickness confronting French society as a whole.
3. The main feature of 'mechanical solidarity' is resemblance. Durkheim feels that there is hardly any difference between individuals in a mechanical solidarity-based society. The members of this solidarity not only experience the same emotions, they also treasure the same values and consider the same things sacred. Therefore, they resemble each other.
4. He rejected the classic explanations of punishment wherein the function of punishments is to check the guilty act and stop it from occurring again. It is Durkheim's belief that the point and meaning of punishment is not to scare. Instead, the rationale is to render satisfaction to the common consciousness. For Durkheim, an act committed by an individual member of the collective offends the collective consciousness, which needs to be compensated. The compensation comes in the form of punishment of the guilty, which satisfies the collective. Sociologically speaking, Durkheim's analysis of punishment could be considered rather accurate.
5. Durkheim aimed to preserve philosophy in secondary education, for which he wished philosophy could be a lot more than merely abstract literature (*littérature abstraite*). It wasn't enough for philosophy to be a mere rhetoric based on an artist's talent. He wanted philosophy to be a lot more scientific by diverging from deductions based on metaphysics. In fact, what guided his epistemology was the rejection of metaphysics, which would become clearer in the study of religion, denying the supernatural emphatically. He disagrees with philosophy so that sociology could stop being an ambiguous social philosophy aimed at rendering a positivist consistency to the study of social facts.
6. For Durkheim, emotion is something essentially fluid and inconsistent. Its contagious influence spreads far beyond its point of origin, extending to everything about it, so that it is not possible to say where its power of propagation ends.
7. According to Durkheim, modern religions are now incapable of ensuring discipline to the same degree as in the past. They hardly possess any authority over morals. It is Durkheim's belief that, if left to himself, man has unlimited desires to motivate him.
8. As per animism, religious beliefs are considered to be held within spirits. These spirits are the transfiguration of the experience men have about their two-fold nature of body and soul.
9. Negative rites are interdicts such as prohibition of eating or touching. They develop in the direction of all religious practices of asceticism.
10. We can define suicide as a positive or negative act performed by the victim himself and which strives to produce a result directly or indirectly in the form of death. An example of a 'positive act' would be to shoot oneself in the temple or to hang oneself. And an example to show that suicide is committed in a negative act would be to remain in a burning building or to refuse all nourishment so as to starve oneself to death.
11. Psychological explanation is dismissed by Durkheim. However, he says that there is psychological predisposition to suicide, and this predisposition can be explained in psychological or psychopathological terms. Individuals suffering from brain disorders are more likely to kill themselves under certain given circumstances. Nonetheless, it is the social force that determines the suicide, not psychological forces as per Durkheim.
12. The three types of suicides that Durkheim has defined are:
    (a) Egoist suicide
    (b) Altruist suicide
    (c) Anomic suicide

NOTES

NOTES

4.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a brief note on the early life of Durkheim.
2. Name the sociologist by whom Durkheim was influenced. Discuss various elements of this influence.
3. What is the difference between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity? Describe with examples.
4. What is the difference between repressive and restitutive law?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe how Durkheim relates to sociology as a science.
2. What is collective consciousness? Discuss its effects on the law.
3. Explain the four types of suicides as described by Durkheim.
4. Describe the theoretical importance of religion in the elementary forms of religious life.

4.12 FURTHER READING

Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.

Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Boguardus, Emory S. 1969. *The Development of Social Theory*. Mumbai: Vakils, Feffa and Simons.

Jayapalan, J. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Ritzer, George. 1988. *Sociological Theory*, Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ritzer, George. 2007. *Sociological Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Adams, Bert N., Rosalind Ann Sydie and R.A. Sydie. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Allan, Kenneth and Kenneth D. Allan. 2009. *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Calhoun, Craig J. 2002. *Classical Sociological Theory*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Edles, Laura and Desfor Scott Appelrouth. 2010. *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era: Text and Readings*. California: Pine Forge Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. 2007. *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. New York: Springer.

NOTES

UNIT 5 MAX WEBER

Structure

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 Rationality and Bureaucracy
5.3 Social Action
  5.3.1 Ideal Types
5.4 Power, Authority and Legitimacy
5.5 Theory of Protestant Ethics and Capitalism
  5.5.1 Religion and Social Change
  5.5.2 Religion of China
  5.5.3 Religion of India
5.6 Class, Status and Power
5.7 Summary
5.8 Key Terms
5.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.10 Questions and Exercises
5.11 Further Reading

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Max Weber, who has been called the 'bourgeois Marx', became a sociologist 'in a long and intense debate with the ghost of Marx'. The title of one of his major works, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft,* his concern with the Protestant ethic, and even his superb studies in *Weltreligionen,* all show his sustained interest in the problems and issues raised by Marx.

Though Weber was influenced by the German historical school—itself engaged in a critical examination of Marx's (and Hegel's) conceptions—the main feature of his overall work was shaped by his debate with Marx; and among those who took up the Marxian challenge, Weber was perhaps the most influential. His main interest, a lifelong preoccupation, was the origin and nature of modern capitalism, which eventually led him not only to a fastidious examination of the economic system of the West but all its major social and cultural institutions. Ultimately, this became a matter of understanding the peculiar nature of Western civilization and important contrasts with the civilizations of the East. In working on this and other problems, he generalized and revised Marx's method. He was not, it will be argued here, refuting Marx; for, as will be seen, he accepted Marx's major methodological principles as extraordinarily fruitful.

Insofar as refutation of Marxism was involved, it was a matter of showing the inadequacy of certain of Marx's revolutionary conclusions and of challenging the alleged human and moral superiority of socialism as compared with capitalism. To say, therefore, as Parsons has, that after an early contact with the Marxian position Weber 'soon recoiled from this, becoming convinced of the indispensability of an important role of 'ideas' in the explanation of great historical processes', is quite incorrect and even has bizarre implications. For it implies that Marx, for whom class consciousness was fundamental in the transition from capitalism to socialism, did not know that ideas were important in history. But this allegation about Weber is also incorrect, for he retained throughout his life the greatest admiration for Marx as a thinker.

NOTES

If Weber 'recoiled', it was from vulgar and dogmatic Marxism—as, indeed, Marx himself had done. The position taken here is that Weber's work must not be read as repudiation of Marx's methodological principles but rather as a 'rounding out' and supplementing of his method. The validity of this assertion can best be assessed by a re-examination of Weber's work.

Max Weber has had a more powerful positive impact on a wide range of sociological theories than any other sociological theorist. This influence is traceable to the sophistication, complexity and sometimes even confusion of Weberian theory. Despite its problems, Weber's work represents a remarkable fusion of historical research and sociological theorizing. We open this unit with a discussion of the theoretical roots and methodological orientation of Weberian theory. We see that Weber, over the course of his career, moved progressively towards a fusion of history and sociology, i.e., towards the development of historical sociology.

The heart of Weberian sociology lies in substantive sociology, not in methodological statements. Although Weber based his theories on his thoughts about social action and social relationships, his main interest was the large-scale structures and institutions of society. We deal especially with his analysis of the three structures of authority—legal, traditional and charismatic. In the context of legal authority, we deal with his famous ideal—typical bureaucratic—and show how he used that tool to analyse traditional and charismatic authority. Of particular interest is Weber's work on charisma. Not only did he have a clear sense of it as a structure of authority, but he was also interested in the processes by which such a structure is produced.

Although his work on social structures—such as authority—is important, it is at the cultural level, in his work on the rationalization of the world, that Weber's most important insights lie. Weber's thoughts on rationalization and various other issues are illustrated in his work on the relationship between religion and capitalism. At one level, this comprises a series of studies of the relationship between ideas (religious ideas) and the development of the spirit of capitalism and, ultimately, capitalism itself. At another level, it is a study of how the West developed a distinctive rational religious system (for example, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism) that inhibits the growth of a rational economic system. It is this kind of majestic sweep over the history of many sectors of the world that helps give Weberian theory its enduring significance.

5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss concepts of rationality and bureaucracy as discussed by Weber
- Explain the theories of Social Action and ideal types of action as propounded by Max Weber
- Examine authority and legitimacy from the perspective given by Max Weber
- Describe the theory of protestant ethics and capitalism as given by Max Weber
- Explain the concepts of class, status and power as explained by Max Weber

5.2 RATIONALITY AND BUREAUCRACY

Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Germany, on 21 April 1864, in a typical middle-class family. The differences between his parents left a deep impression on both his intellectual

NOTES

orientation and psychological development. His father was a bureaucrat who acquired a relatively significant political position. He was clearly a part of the political establishment and as a result eschewed any activity or idealism that would require personal sacrifice or threaten his position within the system. In addition, the senior Weber was a man who enjoyed earthly pleasures and in this and many other ways he stood in sharp contrast to his wife. Max Weber's mother was a devout Calvinist, a woman who sought to lead an ascetic life largely devoid of the pleasure craved by her husband. Her concerns were more otherworldly; she was disturbed by the signs of imperfection which made her insecure that she was not destined for salvation. These deep differences between the parents led to marital tension, and left an immense impact on Weber.

Since it was impossible to emulate both parents, Weber was presented with a clear choice as a child (Marianne Weber 1975, 62). He first seemed to opt for his father's orientation to life, but later he drew close to his mother's approach. Whatever the choice, the tension produced by the need to choose between such polar opposites negatively affected Max Weber's psyche.

At the age of eighteen, Max Weber left home for a short time to attend the University of Heidelberg. He had already demonstrated intellectual precocity, but on a social level he entered Heidelberg as shy and underdeveloped boy. However, it quickly changed after he gravitated towards his father's way of life and joined his father's old duelling fraternity. There he developed socially, at least in part because of the huge quantities of beer he consumed with his peers. In addition, he proudly displayed the duelling scars that were the trademarks of such fraternities.

After three terms, Weber left Heidelberg for military service, and in 1884 he returned to Berlin to his parent's home to take courses at the University of Berlin. He remained there for most of the next eight years as he completed his studies, earned his Ph. D., became a lawyer and started teaching at the University of Berlin. In the process, his interests shifted more towards his lifelong concerns—economics, history and sociology. During his eight years in Berlin, Weber was financially dependent on his father, the circumstances he progressively grew to dislike. At the same time, he moved closer to his mother's values. For example, during one semester as a student, his work habits were described as follows: 'He continues the rigid work discipline, regulates his life by the clock, divides the daily routine into exact section for the various subjects, saves in his way, by feeding himself evenings in his room with a pound of raw chopped beef and four fried eggs' (Mizman 1970, 48; Marianne Weber 1975, 105). Thus Weber, following his mother, had become ascetic and diligent, a compulsive worker—in contemporary terms a 'workaholic'.

This compulsion for work led in 1896 to a position as professor of Economics at Heidelberg. But in 1897, with Weber's academic career blossoming, his father died following a violent argument between them. Shortly thereafter Weber began to manifest symptoms that were to culminate in a nervous breakdown. Often unable to sleep or to work, Weber spent the next six or seven years in near total collapse. After a long hiatus, some of his powers began to return in 1903, but it was not until 1904, when he delivered (in the United States) his first lecture in six and half years, that Weber was able to begin to return to active academic life. In 1904 and 1905, he published one of his best known works, The Protestant's mother's religion on an academic level. Weber announced the ascendance of his religion, though he was not personally religious.

Although he continued to be plagued by psychological problems, after 1904, Weber was able to function, indeed to produce some of his most important works. During these

NOTES

years, Weber published his studies of the world's religions in a historical perspective (for example China, India and ancient Judaism). At the time of his demise (14 June 1920), he was working on his most significant work, *Economy and Society*. Although this book was unfinished still it was published and subsequently translated into many languages.

Apart from producing voluminous writings during this period, Weber was engaged in various other activities as well. He helped in founding the German Sociological Society in 1910. In addition, Weber was politically very active and wrote essays on the important contemporary issues. We have to accept that there was a strife in Weber's life and, more significantly, in his work. He was perpetually torn between the bureaucratic mind, as represented by his father, and his mother's religiosity. This unresolved tension pervades through Weber's work as it permeated his personal life.

Weber's sociological interest in the structures of authority was motivated, at least in part, by his political interests. Weber was no political radical; in fact, he was often called the 'bourgeois Marx' to reflect the similarities in the intellectual interests of Marx and Weber as well as their very different political intellectual interests of Marx. Weber was almost as critical of modern capitalism as Marx but he did not advocate revolution. He wanted to change society gradually, not overthrow it. He had little faith in the ability of the masses to accrete 'better' society. Nonetheless, Weber also saw little hope in the middle classes, which he felt were dominated by short-sighted, petty bureaucrats. For Weber the hope—if indeed he had any hope—lay with the great political leaders rather than with the masses or the bureaucrats. Along with his faith in political leaders went his unswerving nationalism. He placed the nation above all else: 'The vital interests of the nation stand, of course, above democracy and parliamentarianism' (Weber, 1921/1968:1383). Weber preferred democracy as a political form not because he believed in the masses but because it offered maximum dynamism and the best milieu to generate political leaders (Mommsen, 1974). Weber noted that authority structures exist in every social institution, and his political views were related to his analysis of these structures in all settings. Of course, they were most relevant to his views on the polity.

Weber began his analysis of authority structures in a way that was consistent with his assumptions about the nature of action. He defined domination as the 'probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons' (Weber, 1921/1968:212). Domination interested Weber and these were the legitimate forms of domination, or what he called authority. What concerned Weber, and what played a central role in much of this sociology, were the three bases on which authority is made legitimate to followers—the rational, traditional and charismatic bases. In defining these three bases, Weber remained fairly close to his ideas on individual action, but he rapidly moved to the large-scale structures of authority. Authority legitimized on rational grounds rests 'on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands' (Weber, 1921/1968:215). Authority legitimized on traditional grounds is based on 'an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them' (Weber, 1921/1968:215). Lastly, authority legitimized by charisma is supported on the devotion of followers to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of leaders as well as on the normative order sanctioned by them. All these means of legitimizing authority plainly imply individual actors, through processes (beliefs), and actions.

Legal authority can take a variety of structural forms, but the one that interested Weber most was the bureaucracy, which he considered as 'the purest type of exercise of legal authority' (1921/1968:220).

NOTES

Ideal-Typical Bureaucracy

Weber depicted bureaucracies in ideal-typical terms. Although he was well aware of their failings, Weber portrayed bureaucracies in a highly positive way.

Despite his discussion of the positive characteristics of bureaucracies here and elsewhere in his work, there is a fundamental ambivalence in his attitude towards them. Although he detailed their advantages, he was well aware of their problems. Weber expressed various reservations about bureaucratic organizations. For example, he was cognizant of the 'red tape' that often makes dealing with bureaucracies so trying and so difficult. However, his major fear was that the rationalization which dominates all aspects of bureaucratic life was a threat to individual liberty.

Weber was appalled by the effects of bureaucratization and, more generally, of the rationalization of the world of which bureaucratization is but one component, but he saw no way out. He discussed bureaucracies as 'escape proof', 'practically unshatterable', and along the same lines, he felt that the institutions tend to destroy once they are established. Similarly, he felt that individual bureaucrats could not 'squirm out' of the bureaucracy after getting 'harnessed' in it. Weber summarized that 'the future belongs to bureaucratization' (1921/1968:1401), and the time has borne out his forecast.

Given below are the key characteristics of the ideal-typical bureaucracy:

1. It comprises a continuous organization of official functions (offices) constrained by rules.
2. Each office has a particular and defined sphere of competence and capability. The office carries with it a set of obligations and duties to perform different functions, the authority to fulfill these functions, and the modes of compulsion needed to accomplish the job.
3. The offices are organized into a hierarchical system.
4. The offices may involve technical qualifications in them which require that the participants get suitable training.
5. The staff which fills these offices does not own the production means associated with them. The staff members are allowed the use of those things which they require to finish the job.
6. The incumbent is not allowed to appropriate the position; it always remains part of the organization.
7. Administrative acts, decisions and rules are formulated and recorded in writing.

Bureaucracy is one of the rational structures which is playing an ever-increasing role in modern society, but one may wonder whether there is any alternative to the bureaucratic structure. Weber's clear and unequivocal answer was that there is no possible alternative: 'The needs of mass administration make it today completely indispensable. The choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration.'

Although we might admit that bureaucracy is an intrinsic part of modern capitalism, we might ask whether a socialist society might be different. Is it possible to create a socialist system without bureaucracies and bureaucrats? Weber believed that in the case of socialism we would see an increase, not a decrease, in bureaucratization. If socialism were to achieve a level of efficiency comparable to capitalism, 'it would mean a tremendous increase in the importance of professional bureaucrats' (Weber 1921/1968:224). In capitalism, at least the owners are not bureaucrats, but in socialism even

NOTES

the top-level leaders would be bureaucrats. Weber thus believed that even with its problems 'capitalism presented the best chances for the preservation of individual freedom and creative leadership in a bureaucratic world' (Mommsen, 1974: xv). We are once again at a key theme in Weber's work: his view that there is really no hope for a better world. Socialists can, in Weber's view, only make things worse by expanding the degree of bureaucratization in society.

A ray of hope in Weber's work—and it is a small one—is that professionals who stand outside the bureaucratic system can control it to some degree. In this category, Weber included professional politicians, scientists and even capitalists, as well as the supreme heads of the bureaucracies. For example, Weber said that politicians 'must be the countervailing force against bureaucratic domination' (1921/1964:1417). His famous essay '*Politics as a Vocation*' is basically a plea for the development of political leaders with a calling to oppose the rule of bureaucracies and of bureaucrats. Similarly, in '*Science as a Vocation*' Weber made a plea for professional scientists who can counteract the increasing bureaucratization and rationalization of science. However, in the end these professionals are simply another aspect of the rationalization process and that their development only serves to accelerate that process.

In his thinking about traditional authority structures, Weber used his ideal typical bureaucracy as a methodological tool. His objective was to pinpoint the differences between a traditional authority structure and the ideal-typical bureaucracy.

Whereas legal authority stems from the legitimacy of a rational-legal system, traditional authority is based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers that there is virtue in the sanctity of age-old rule and powers. The leader in such a system is not a superior but a personal master. The administrative staff consists not of officials but mainly of personal retainers.

Although the bureaucratic staff owes its allegiance and obedience to enacted rules and to the leader, who acts in their name, the staff of the traditional leader obeys because the leader carries the weight of tradition—he or she has been chosen for that position in the traditional manner. What interested Weber was the staff of the traditional leader and how it measured up to the ideal-typical bureaucratic staff. He concluded that it was lacking on a number of counts. The traditional staff lacks offices with clearly defined sphere of competence which is subject to impersonal rules. It also does not have rational ordering of relations of superiority and inferiority.

Further, it lacks a clear hierarchy. There is no regular system of appointment and promotion on the basis of free contacts. Technical training is not a regular requirement or obtaining a position or an appointment. Appointments do not carry with them fixed salaries paid in money.

Weber used his ideal-type methodology not only to compare traditional to rational-legal authority and to underscore the most salient characteristics of traditional authority but also to analyse historically the different forms of traditional authority. A gerontocracy involves rule by elders, whereas primary patriarchies involves leaders who inherit their positions. Both of these forms have a supreme chief but lack an administrative staff. They therefore lack a bureaucracy. A more modern form is patrimonialism, which is traditional domination with an administration and a military force that are purely personal instruments of the master. Still more modern is feudalism, which limits the discretion of the master through the development of more routine, even contractual, relationships between leader and subordinate. This, in turn, leads to more stabilized power positions that exist in patrimonialism.

NOTES

All four of these forms differ significantly from rational-legal authority. Weber saw structures of traditional authority, in any form, as barriers to the development of rationality. Weber argued that the structures and practices of traditional authority constitute a barrier to the rise of rational economic structures—in particular, capitalism—as well as to various other components of a rational society. Even patrimonialism—a more modern form of traditionalism—while permitting the development of certain forms of 'primitive' capitalism, does not allow for the rise of the highly rational type of capitalism characteristic of the modern West.

The concept of charisma plays an important role in the work of Max Weber, but he had a conception of it very different from that held by most lay people today. Even though Weber did accept that a charismatic leader may possess exceptional characteristics, his sense of charisma was more dependent on the group of followers and the manner in which they defined the charismatic leader. To put Weber's position in a straightforward manner, if the followers define a leader as charismatic, then he or she is likely to be a charismatic leader irrespective of whether he or she really possesses any outstanding characteristics. In this manner a leader is set apart from the ordinary people and respected as if endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least exceptional powers or qualities which are not available to the common people.

To Weber, charisma was a revolutionary force, one of the most important revolutionary forces in the social world. Whereas traditional authority clearly is inherently conservative, the rise of a charismatic leader may well pose a threat to that system (as well as to a rational-legal system) and lead to a dramatic change in that system. What distinguishes charisma as a revolutionary force is that it leads to changes in the minds of actors; it causes a 'subjective or internal reorientation'. Such changes may lead to 'a radical alteration of the central attitudes toward different problems of the World'.

Although Weber was here addressing changes in the thoughts and actions of individuals, such changes are clearly reduced to the status of dependent variables. Weber focused on changes in the structure of authority, i.e., the rise of charismatic authority. When such a new authority structure emerges, it is likely to change people's thoughts and actions dramatically. The other major revolutionary force in Weber's theoretical system, and the one with which he was much more concerned, is (formal) rationality.

Whereas charisma is an internal revolutionary force that changes the minds of actors, Weber saw (formal) rationality as an external revolutionary force changing the structures of society first and then ultimately the thoughts and actions of individuals. Weber was interested in the revolutionary character of charisma as well as its structure and the necessity that its basic character be transformed and routinized in order for it to survive as a system of authority.

In his analysis of charisma, Weber began, as he did with traditional authority, with the ideal-typical bureaucracy. He sought to determine to what degree the structure of charismatic authority, with its disciples and staff, differs from the bureaucratic system. Compared to that of the ideal-typical bureaucracy the staff of the charismatic leader is lacking on virtually all counts.

The staff members are not technically trained but are chosen instead for their possession of charismatic qualities or, at least, of qualities similar to those possessed by the charismatic leader. The offices they occupy form no clear hierarchy. Their work does not constitute a career, and there are no promotions, clear appointments or dismissals. The charismatic leader is free to intervene whenever he or she feels that the staff cannot handle a situation. The organization has no formal rules, no established

administrative organs, and no precedents to guide new judgements. In these and other ways, Weber found the staff of the charismatic leader to be 'greatly inferior' to the staff in a bureaucratic form of organization.

NOTES

Weber's interest in the organization behind the charismatic leader and the staff that inhabits it led him to the question of what happens to charismatic authority when the leader dies. After all, a charismatic system is inherently fragile; it would seem to be able to survive only as long as the charismatic leader lives. But is it possible for such an organization to live after the leader dies? The answer to this question is of greatest consequence to the staff members of the charismatic leader, for they are likely to live on after the leader dies. They are also likely to have a vested interest in the continued existence of the organization: if the organization ceases to exist, they are out of work. Thus the challenge for the staff is to create a situation in which charisma in some adulterated form persists even after the leader's death. It is a difficult struggle because, for Weber, charisma is by its nature unstable; it exists in its pure form only as long as the charismatic leader lives.

In order to cope with the departure of the charismatic leader, the staff (as well as the followers) may adopt a variety of strategies to create a more lasting organization. The staff may search out a new charismatic leader, but even if the search is successful, the new leader is unlikely to achieve the same aura as his or her predecessor. A set of rules also may be developed that allows the group to identify future charismatic leaders. But such rules rapidly become tradition, and what was charismatic leadership is on the way towards becoming traditional authority. In any case, the nature of leadership is radically changed as the purely personal character of charisma is eliminated. Still another technique is to allow the charismatic leader to designate his or her successor and thereby to transfer charisma symbolically to the next in line. Again it is questionable whether this is ever very successful or whether it can be successful in the long run. Another strategy is having the staff designate a successor and having its choice accepted by the larger community. The staff could also create ritual tests, with the new charismatic leader being the one who successfully undergoes the tests. However, all these efforts are doomed to failure.

5.3 SOCIAL ACTION

Weber's entire sociology, if we accept his words at face value, was based on his conception of social action (Turner, 1983). He differentiated between action and purely reactive behaviour. The concept of behaviour is reserved, then as now (Ritzer, 1975a), to automatic behaviour that involves no thought processes—a stimulus and response. Such behaviour was not of interest in Weber's sociology. He was bothered about action which clearly involved the intervention of thought processes (and the consequent meaningful action) between the happening of a stimulus and the eventual response. To put it slightly differently, action was said to occur when individuals attached subjective meanings to their action. To Weber, the task of sociological analysis involved 'the interpretation of action in terms of its subjective meaning' (1921/1968:8). A good, and more specific, example of Weber's thinking on action is found in his discussion of economic action, which he defined as 'a conscious, primary orientation to economic provision, but the belief that it is necessary' (1921/1968:64).

In embedding his analysis in mental processes and the resulting meaningful action, Weber (1921/1968) was careful to point out that it is erroneous to regard psychology as the foundation of the interpretation of action in sociology. Weber seemed to be making essentially the same point made by Durkheim in discussing at least some nonmaterial social facts. That is, sociologists are interested in mental processes, but this is not the same as psychologists' interest in the mind, personality and so forth.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the basic difference between the personalities of Weber's parents?
2. What was the key difference between Weber's and Marx's approach to capitalism?
3. What is traditional authority based on, as compared to rational-legal system?
4. Why did Weber consider charisma a revolutionary force?

NOTES

Although Weber implied that he had a great concern with mental processes, he actually spent little time on them. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills have called attention to Weber's lack of concern with mental processes:

'Weber sees in the concept of personality a much abused notion referring to a profoundly irrational centre of creativity, a centre before which analytical inquiry come to a halt' (1958:55). Schutz (1932/1967) was quite correct when he pointed out that although Weber's work on mental processes is suggestive, it is hardly the basis for a systematic micro-sociology. However, it was the suggestiveness of his work that made him relevant to those who developed the theories of individuals and their behaviour—symbolic internationalism, phenomenology and so forth.

In this action theory, Weber's clear intent was to focus on individuals and patterns and regularities of action and not on the collectivity. 'Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behaviour exists only as the behaviour of one or more individual human beings' (Weber' 1921/1968:13). Weber was prepared to admit that for some purposes, we may have to treat collectivities as individuals 'but for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since, these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action' (1921/1968:13). It would seem that Weber could hardly be more explicit; the sociology of action is ultimately concerned with individuals, not collectivities.

Not every kind of action, even the explicit action, is 'social' in nature. Overt action is non-social if it is oriented just to the behaviour of lifeless objects. Subjective attitudes comprise social action only so far as they are oriented to others' behaviour. For example, religious behaviour is not social if it is just a matter of meditation or private prayer. A person's economic activity is only social if, and then only in so far as, it takes into consideration the behaviour of others. So generally in formal terms an action becomes social in so far as the actor's real control over economic goods is respected by others.

It is accepted that the individual's actions are strongly influenced just by the fact that he is a part of a crowd confined in a limited space. Further, it is also possible for huge numbers, though scattered, to be influenced simultaneously or successively by a source of influence operating likewise on all the individuals, e.g., by means of press. Here also the behaviour of an individual is affected by his membership of the crowd and by the fact that he is by the mere fact that the individual acts as the part of a gathering.

5.3.1 Ideal Types

Weber suggested four ideal types of action as the basic building blocks for sociology:

- Instrumentally rational action
- Value-rational action
- Traditional action
- Affectional action

Action is instrumentally logical when people accept entirely technical means for the realization of their objectives. The action comprises a clear goal or intention, and

NOTES

means are chosen as the best or most efficient ways of achieving it. The capitalist entrepreneur strives for the most efficient and economic means to attain the maximum profit from a specific business line.

Similarly, the party leader works out the most feasible combination of policy proposals which may maximize the party's vote in the upcoming elections. Weber states that most of the economic, political and scientific actions involving prudent choice and decision-making are comparable to such action. On the other hand, value-rational action is the action which is rational in relation to some irrational or arbitrarily chosen value. The religious believer praying and giving alms to the poor might be acting in a value-rational manner. He/she is acting in this manner for its own sake and as an absolute duty. Here instrumental considerations are not taken into account at all. In such an action, there is no distinct or easily observable objective, even if a believer hopes that his or her actions may lead to salvation. In value-rational action, there is no suggestion that actions are technically suitable in cause–effect terms. However, they are rational in the means that they take up for expressing specific values.

Traditional action is unreflective and habitual by nature. It barely involves some degree of rationality. Traditional action is done as a matter of routine, with little or no conscious reflection. People just act in the way like they have usually done in similar situations in the past. Various everyday actions have this traditional, habitual character. Ultimately, affectual action involves the direct expression of an emotion, taking no account of its connection to any particular values or goals. For example, angry outbursts of violence would be seen as effectual by nature.

Since these four types of action are ideal types, they do not exist distinctly in reality. All the tangible patterns of action are expected to be interpretable in terms of more than one type. For instance, the actions of a manager in a big business enterprise facing the need to set a wage level for its employees may comprise various aspects of all the four types of action mentioned above. The manager might instrumentally work out the financial outcomes of various rates of pay, but may also rule out exceedingly low pay and definite forms of coercion as opposite to his/her values. The manager may also unreflectively respond to the wage negotiations, handling them in the way that he/she did in the past, and taking reactive stance against the trade union proposals. Ultimately, the negotiation breakdown may result in angry accusations as one side or the other walks away from the bargaining table.

To find out how closely a specific course of action corresponds to these and other ideal types, it is essential to use a technique which Weber finds as central to sociology—the technique of understanding (Verstehen in German). The objective of a social science, states Weber, is to use ideal types as the means of understanding the meanings which people give to their actions. These meanings comprise their intentions and motives, their expectations about the behaviour of others, and their perceptions of the situation in which they find themselves. Sociologists should deduce these meanings by observing people's actions, and then aim at an interpretative understanding of the same. It comprises empathizing with those that they study, although it does not mean sympathizing with them.

For instance, we may not approve of serial murder but we can hope to explain it only if we get close enough to serial murderers to begin to see the world as they see it. We should use empathy by trying to identify with them up to the point at which we can understand why they acted in such a wanton manner. However, we do not sympathize with them or condone their actions. To go beyond empathy to sympathy is to make the same mistake as those who go beyond factual judgements to value judgements.

NOTES

5.4 POWER, AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY

Max Weber gave a theory of authority that included three types of authority. He laid down a path towards understanding how authority gets legitimized as a belief system. The English translation of his essay '*The three types of legitimate rule*' was published posthumously in 1958. It is the most lucid explanation on the issue.

Weber demarcates three fundamental types of legitimate domination: (i) traditional, (ii) charismatic and (iii) legal or rational. These three forms do not comprise the entirety of domination types but they represent how it is feasible for some individuals to exercise power over others. Authority broadens and maintains power and proves that a study of its origins can show how people get ready to accept this domination as a customary and structured phenomenon. It is noteworthy that these are ideal types, with any real use of power being prone to have aspects of more than one kinds of authority, and may be even other forms of power like the use of force or intimidation. Hence Weber's classification of legitimacy is taken as the basis of a righteous investigation of the nature of authority in the modern-day civilizations.

Traditional Authority

Throughout history traditional authority has existed in various societies. The sanctity of tradition legitimizes the traditional authority. Usually the capability and the right to rule are passed down through heredity. However, it does not assist social change. On the other hand, it tends to be inconsistent and irrational, and perpetuates the status quo. Weber analyzed why this particular form of authority was maintained, and what were the obstructions to the development of more logical or legal forms of authority characteristic of the Western societies. Specifically, Weber was focused upon how these traditional forms of authority restricted the development of capitalism in non-Western societies.

Weber stated that traditional authority is a means through which inequality gets created and preserved. If there is no challenge to the authority of the traditional leader or group, the leader is expected to stay dominant. Traditional form of authority is derived from an established faith in the sanctity of age-old traditions and the legality of the status of those wielding authority over them. In this kind of authority, the traditional rights of an influential and dominant individual or group are accepted and are not challenged by the subordinate individuals.

Weber stated that this traditionalist domination 'rests upon a belief in the sanctity of everyday routines' (Gerth and Mills, p. 297). Ritzer states that 'traditional authority is based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers, that there is virtue in the sanctity of age-old rules and powers' (p. 132). These rights can be (i) religious, sacred or spiritual forms, (ii) well-established and gradually changing culture, or (ii) tribal, family or clan type structures. The types of traditional authority are as follows:

(i) Gerontocracy or rule by elders.

(ii) Patriarchy wherein positions are inherited.

(iii) Patrimonialism or rule by an administration or military force that are entirely personal instruments of the master.

(iv) Feudalism type of authority was important historically. It is a more routinized form of rule, with 'contractual relationships between leader and subordinate'.

NOTES

Traditional authority is characteristically embodied in feudalism or patrimonialism. In an entirely patriarchal structure, 'the servants are completely and personally dependent upon the lord'. On the other hand, in an estate system (i.e., feudalism), 'the servants are not personal servants of the lord but independent men' (Weber, 1958:4). However, in both cases the system of authority does not change or evolve. Hence, gerontocracy and patrimonialism are the forms of traditional authority. Gerontocracy means the rule by elders, and patrimonialism stands for the rule by someone designated by inheritance. There is still a common idea of everybody being a member of the group, although there is by no means equal distribution of power. A patrimonial retainer may be supported through: maintenance at his lord's table, allowances from the chief (mainly in kind), rights of land use in lieu of services, and appropriation of property income, fees or taxes by fiefs.

Charismatic Authority

Charismatic authority is possessed by a leader whose vision and mission is capable of inspiring others. Its roots are found in the perceived astonishing characteristics of a person. Weber defined a charismatic leader as the leader of a new social movement, and the one endowed with divine or supernatural powers, e.g., a religious prophet. According to him, charismatic authority subsists on the devotion to the explicit and exceptional heroism, sanctity or commendable character of a person and of the normative patterns of order revealed or ordained by him.

Charisma stands for the quality of an individual personality which is viewed as extraordinary. The followers might view this quality to be endowed with supernatural, superhuman or exceptional qualities or powers. Whether such powers exist in reality or not is not relevant—the mere fact that followers believe that such powers exist is more significant. Weber views charisma as a driving and creative force that rushes through traditional authority and established rules. The singular basis of charismatic authority is the acceptance or recognition of the claims of the leader by the followers. 'While it is unreasonable, in that it is not computable or systematic, it can be revolutionary, breaking traditional rule and may even put up a challenge to the legal authority' (Giddens, p. 160–161).

A particular leader might possess extraordinary characteristics which make him/her a leader. It may relate to an extraordinary gift of a leader, a distinguishing speaking style and acting, or astonishing qualities, for instance personalities like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Hitler and so on. The charismatic leader attains and maintains authority exclusively by proving his mettle in life. If he desires to be a prophet, he should perform miracles; if he wants to be a warlord, he should perform heroic acts. Finally, nonetheless, his divine mission should 'prove' itself in that those who devotedly surrender to him must fare well. In case they do not fare well, he is perceptibly not the master sent by the Gods.

Charisma has deficiencies as a long-term source of authority. However, it may be really effective during the lifetime of the charismatic leader. If it has to be continued, it should be transformed into a legal or traditional form of authority. Further, it might be exercised in an illogical way, preventing the development of more rational forms, particularly the ones leading to capitalism. Also, there is a chance that administration of charismatic authority results in the development of legal and rational authority. Charismatic authority gets 'routinized' in various ways. According to Weber, 'Orders are traditionalized, the staff or followers change into legal or 'estate-like' (traditional) staff, or the meaning of charisma itself may undergo change.'

NOTES

It would be appropriate to discuss the process of the routinization of charisma. In basic form, charismatic authority exists just in the process of originating. It turns either rationalized or traditionalized, or a combination of both for the following reasons: ideal and material interests of the followers in the repeated reactivation of the community interests of the administrative staff, followers or disciples of the charismatic leader in maintaining their positions, so that their own standing is established on a day-to-day basis. Huge masses of people exist; it paves the way for the forces of daily routine.

There is an objective requirement of patterns of order and organization of the administrative staff to fulfill the normal, everyday needs and conditions of running the administration. Further, there is a craving for security, needing legitimization of positions of authority and social prestige and economic advantages held by the followers. Thus, the process of routinization is not limited to the succession problem, and does not come to an end when it is solved. The most basic problem is the changeover from the charismatic administrative staff and its administrative mode to one which can tackle everyday circumstances.

Following are the possible types of solution:

1. Search for new charismatic leader on the basis of criteria that will entitle him for the position of authority.
2. Revelation thorough oracles, lots, etc. Legitimacy is then dependent upon the technique of selection, which represents a form of legalization.
3. By the leader designating his successor.
4. The designation of a successor by the charismatically qualified staff, and the successor's recognition by the community. The legitimacy may come to depend upon the technique of selection.
5. Hereditary charisma which may lead to either traditionalization or legalization (divine right, etc.).
6. The charisma transmitted through ritual means from one bearer to another, or created in a new individual, which might become the charisma of office (e.g., the Big Potato, the Pope himself).

In one form, routinization also appropriates the powers of control and economic advantages by the disciples. Further, it may be either legal or traditional, on the basis of whether or not legislation of some kind is involved.

Rational-Legal Authority

Legal-rational authority gets empowered by a formalistic belief in the content of the law (legal) or natural law (rationality). A specific individual leader does not get entitled to obedience by the people—whether charismatic or traditional—but a set of uniform principles is put at his/her disposal.

According to Weber, bureaucracy (political or economic) was the best example of legal-rational authority. This kind of authority is commonly found in the modern state, city governments, private and public corporations, and many voluntary associations. Rational-legal authority or legitimate domination resting on 'rational grounds—resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issues commands' (Weber, p. 215).

It is stated to subsist upon a faith in the legality patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to the authority under such rules to issue commands. It might also be stated that rational legitimacy—identified with legality by Weber—is the only kind of

NOTES

legitimacy to survive in the contemporary world. All the bearers of the power of command are legitimated in so far as these correspond with the norms. There are numerous ways through which legal authority may establish. These are:

1. Systems of convention
2. Laws and regulation evolve in various societies
3. Various principles of legality occurring around

The evolution of law in the West goes on to establish a legal system which ensures that there is a rule of law, written legal codes, legal rights and rules, and the 'professionalized administration of justice by persons who have received their legal training formally and systematically' (Ritzer, p. 129).

As the political or legal system develops in this logical way, authority adopts a legal shape. Those governing or ruling either possess, or seem to possess a lawful legal right to do so. The subordinates within this system recognize the legality of the rulers, with a belief that they possess the lawful right to exercise power. Those with power then use it on the basis of this right of legitimacy.

As the rational legal system develops, there has to be a political system that becomes rationalized in a similar manner. The constitutions, codified documents and established offices, streamlined means of representation, regular elections and political procedures are the basic elements of this systematization. These are developed in opposition to earlier systems like monarchies or other traditional forms, where there are no established sets of rules. This rational-legal form of authority might be challenged by the ones who are in a subordinate position. This opposition is usually not likely to bring about dramatic changes in the system's nature very rapidly.

Weber stated that in future the rational-legal types of authority will become more and more dominant. A charismatic leader or movement may occupy the scene, but the predominant tendency will be for the organizations to become more routinized, rational and bureaucratic in nature. The legal authority can be interpreted in this sense. In contemporary societies, authority is in big part exercised on the basis of bureaucracies.

Inter-relationships between Traditional, Charismatic and Rational-Legal Authority

Weber's theory of authority is very comprehensive and elaborate in nature. Weber and several other political sociologists have denoted various interesting relationships and processes taking place between the different types. The three types of authority may be consolidated by the characteristics that distinguish them from others.

- Charismatic authority is dynamic (unlike tradition) and non-rational (again, unlike legal-rational).
- Traditional authority is impersonal (unlike charisma) and non-rational (unlike legal-rational).
- Legal-rational authority is dynamic (unlike tradition) and impersonal (unlike charisma).

However, Blau (1974) stated that 'traditional authority is un-dynamic, charismatic authority is personal, and legal-rational is rational'. The possibility of retaining a specific type of authority might depend on the ability of that authority system to maintain the features which make it exceptional and reject the characteristics that make it more beneficial for another type of authority.

NOTES

Further, it has been observed that a specific kind of authority may lose its power to—and hence transition into—other kind of authority in the following manner. For instance, revolutionary ideals may be advocated by a charismatic leader or the logical pursuit of ends through abstract formal principles can both deteriorate traditional authority. The revolutionary charismatic movements may be crystallized into a traditional order or bureaucratized into a logical formal organization. Ultimately, the illogical forces and powers of tradition or charisma may lessen the position of legal-rational authority. It has also been observed that Weber's three kinds of authority are comparable to his three categories of inequality: (i) class, (ii) status groups and (iii) parties. Traditional authority is the basis for status groups. Charismatic authority depends on a market scheme (like the potential for life chances), and Weber viewed it to be the result of class. Ultimately, parties are the codification of legal-rational authority, particularly in the case of bureaucracies.

Distinction between Power, Authority and Legitimacy

The expression 'authority' stands for an abstract concept possessing both sociological and psychological components. Hence it is very difficult to differentiate these concepts. In fact, the ideas of power, authority and legitimacy are basically interrelated. It is a concern not just in the abstract sense in terms of how these three are related, but also in the concrete since scholars themselves are usually accountable for entangling them. One is defined as the function of the other and vice-versa till the reader doesn't understand where to turn anymore to get help.

5.5 THEORY OF PROTESTANT ETHICS AND CAPITALISM

According to Weber, capitalism was a modern phenomenon: a very sophisticated system of institutions, extremely rational in character, and the product of various developments atypical of Western civilization. In these terms, capitalism was unique—both in the sense that such a system never emerged spontaneously in the East. Capitalism is not as old as history and should not be confused with the various forms of capitalistic activity (speculative, commercial, adventurous, political, etc.), which were indeed known in previous periods of Western history and in the civilizations of the East as well. The emergence of the new socio-economic system in the West could not be taken for granted as an automatic consequence of the growing rationalization of all aspects of life. It had fought its way to supremacy 'against a whole world of hostile forces', and its victory over the traditional forces of the middle Ages was not 'historically inevitable' or 'historically necessary'.

As he stated in one of his final pronouncements on the subject: 'In the last resort the factor which produced capitalism is the rational permanent enterprise, rational accounting, rational technology, and rational law, but again not these alone. Necessary complementary factors were the rational spirit, the rationalization of the conduct of life in general, and a rationalistic economic ethic.' In the early essays, he is exploring in a provisional way the source of the rational spirit and conduct in the ethics of Protestantism.

Although he is not altogether clear on this score, he does seem to treat ethics as a 'necessary complementary factor'. But what he really means, as becomes clearer from his later essays, is not that capitalism would not have arisen without it—indeed he himself acknowledged that it had in some places—but rather that the peculiarly energetic

Check Your Progress

5. What was Weber's focus in the social action theory?
6. Name the four ideal types of action as the building blocks of sociology, suggested by Weber.
7. Weber demarcates three fundamental types of legitimate domination. What are they?
8. What are the limitations of the charismatic form of authority?

NOTES

form it assumed in a certain historical period might be attributed to the 'elective affinity' between the ethical injunctions of ascetic Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism. The emphasis here being on spirit; there was such great congruence between the two, that they mutually reinforced each other to produce a methodical devotion to work and business activity and thus to a vigorous development of capitalism.

In the Protestant Ethic, Weber starts by drawing attention to what he considers important differences between Protestants and Catholics in terms of their inclinations towards technical, industrial, and commercial studies and occupations. Protestants were much more inclined to pursue these studies and to be engaged in capitalistic enterprise while Catholics seem to prefer the more traditional humanistic studies. Among workers, too, it appeared that Catholics remained in the more traditional occupations, e.g., crafts, while Protestants acquired industrial skills and even filled administrative positions. These differences could not be accounted for in terms of advantages of inherited wealth but rather had to be explained by the character of the religious education and values which the two groups received and communities. What seemed all the more striking to Weber about the smaller representation of Catholics in 'modern business life' was that as a minority, suffering certain political disabilities, they should have sought all the more forcefully to engage in economic activity (as had other minorities, notably the Jews).

Weber looked, in particular, at the Calvinist forms of Protestantism that developed from the ideas of John Calvin. Calvinists believed that only a small minority—the elect—were destined by God for salvation and would join Him in heaven. The remainders were destined for eternal damnation. Nothing that people did during their lives could make any difference to their destiny, which reflected God's choice, and there was no way in which any individual believer could know whether he or she was destined for salvation or damnation. As a result, Calvinists experienced what Weber called 'inner loneliness'. They were completely on their own, having no one to whom they could turn for authoritative guidance on their eternal destiny. This extreme anxiety about their fate caused great uncertainty about how they should behave. Protestant ministers and teachers responded to this by stressing those other aspects of Calvinism that might help to resolve the anxieties of their parishioners. Calvin had said that success in a person's calling might be seen as a sign that he or she was destined for salvation. A calling or vocation was the particular way of life to which one had been called by God.

Calvin's followers concluded that God would hardly allow worldly success to those whom he had damned. The Puritan sects of the 17th century—especially the Quakers and the Baptists—developed an ethic that saw success in an occupation, business or profession as giving people some indication of whether they were saved or damned. They began to encourage their members to be diligent and hard-working in their work and disciplined in all aspects of their lives. Those who worked hard found that they were, indeed, likely to be successful, and this helped to lessen their sense of anxiety about their destiny (Marshall, 1982).

Weber described this lifestyle as one of asceticism. The ascetic lifestyle involved hard work, discipline, the avoidance of waste, and the rigorous and systematic use of time. This rational and calculative attitude was applied in all aspects of life. In the Puritan worldview, eating and sexuality were seen as stimulating the bodily appetites and, therefore, as things to be controlled. Fasting, the avoidance of non-reproductive sex, and, outside marriage, a life of chastity and celibacy were all seen as means of self-control through which a mastery of the body could be attained.

NOTES

The pursuit of these values by 17th-century merchants in the Puritan sects led them to greater business success than their counterparts in other religions. Their ascetic way of life stressed the avoidance of excessive income and wasteful or luxurious consumption, and this led them to plough back their profits into their businesses and so to expand their scale of operations.

Asceticism gave a new meaning to practical economic life. A distinctively modern view of commercial activity and an ethnic of hard work were encouraged, and it was this new outlook and orientation that allowed capitalist business enterprises to expand on an unprecedented scale in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Protestant ethic, Weber argued, had given birth to the spirit of modern capitalism.

In the favourable conditions provided by the nation states of western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, this spirit helped to produce modern capitalist system of production. This system rapidly spread across Europe and into the wider world. In the longer term, however, the success of the capitalist system undermined sacred, religious meanings. In expanding capitalist societies, Weber argued that individuals are forced to work by economic necessity, and not by any spiritual commitment to it as a calling.

For most people there is simply no alternative to capitalist economic activity: if employers do not make a profit, then the pressures of competition will force them out of business; and if employees do not work hard, they will be sacked and replaced by those who will. The spirit of modern capitalism disappears, and modern life becomes increasingly empty and meaningless.

5.5.1 Religion and Social Change

In Weber's opinion, religious belief was to be encouraged to bring a change in social structure. His social action approach was connected with interpretive sociology, where the interpretation of beliefs leads on to action. *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* showed that the belief of Calvinists regarding their lifestyle and attitude for work was equivalent to the need for capitalism in a stage of dynamic early growth. In a situation of common human poverty and desperate need, one means of knowing was self-reliance and personal favour in terms of wealth—combined with a godly lifestyle. Thus, a Calvinist would invest his money and not indulge in overconsumption. He and his dutiful family lived the simple life, and invested the money made back into the business. Some Calvinists like Leonard Chamberlain of Hull became very wealthy and set up Trusts to fund social, educational and religious causes.

As a result of such religious beliefs and consequent action, it is argued that there was a direct effect on capitalist growth. Weber studied religions around the world, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Ancient Judaism. He saw the roots of capitalism in Ancient Judaism, but not in Hinduism or Buddhism, and nor in Roman Catholicism where people could over consume 'sinfully' and receive forgiveness. This repetitive attitude depicted that no economic dynamism could suit the believers of Calvinism, who were actively righteous.

Weber tried to show that a change of attitude and action might come from a continuing traditional stance to the one of change and investment. Unlike functionalists, Weber explained social change. Weber looked at forms of rationality going into modern society. A traditional rationality (such as the Catholic, Hindu and Buddhist) gives way to much more purposeful rationalities, either with an irrational end carried out by rational means, which would be that of the Calvinist, or a rational end carried out by rational means.

NOTES

A transition between a capitalism that is motivated by religion to a developed capitalism that no longer needs a religious spirit—it acquires its own dynamic and rationality. This is the triumph of bureaucracy, a depressing, rational organization of work, and Weber saw this as disenchantment, meaning lacking in human spirit. Thus, Weber proposed that rationality meant people would always suffer anomie whether in socialism or capitalism. It also meant that as society continued to modernize this way, religion would have no further relevant social function. For Weber, religion would have no social function even under a developed capitalism. Nevertheless, religion does seem to retain some social role, such as observance in state occasions, and perhaps this is to keep a level of enchantment at state level. Religion is itself part of the social change.

Weber saw collective conscience in modern organic society as weaker; indeed he proposed that religion might become not the worship of society but of individuals, making individuals sacred. Therefore, religion would have moved from a conservative social role inhibiting social change to none. Weber began among social groups and only had a partial systemic view; he regarded religion to be encouraging social change.

5.5.2 Religion of China

Students of economic development in the West had stressed two factors, which, among others, had contributed greatly to the rise of capitalism: the great influx of precious metals and a significant growth in population. Weber observes, however, that in the case of China similar developments were evident.

The Chinese city was fundamentally different from the Occidental one: it did not become a centre in which capitalist relationships and institutions could germinate, for it lacked political autonomy. Unlike the *polis* of antiquity and the commune of the Middle Ages, it had neither political privileges nor military power of its own .The Occidental city became sufficiently strong to repel an army of knights and was not dependent for its survival on any centralized bureaucracy. Political associations of merchant and craft guilds were non-existent in the Chinese 'city', and legal contracts, either economic or political, could not be made. In short, there did not emerge a relatively independent bourgeois class centred in relatively autonomous towns (the fruit of prolonged struggle and revolts). Revolts were indeed common in the Chinese city but these were to remove specific officials or to change specific practices, not to guarantee the freedom of the city. These differences between the Occidental and Oriental cities can be traced to their different origins. The *polis* of antiquity was an overseas trading city, whereas in China trade was predominantly inland. And in order to preserve tradition, foreign trade and contact were limited to a single port, Canton. Furthermore, industrial development was not centred in the city where it could, as in the West, escape the control of traditional groups and interests. Thus, the economic, political and formal-legal foundations of an autonomous and rational organization of industry and commerce were absent. Control of the rivers, in China as in Egypt and other ancient civilizations, led to some rationalization of the economy but was greatly limited due to religious and other conditions.

River regulation, the basis of imperial authority, was assured not by empirical-rational means alone but by the conduct of the emperor who had to abide by the imperatives of the classical scriptures. If, for example, the dikes broke, this was evidence that he did not have the qualities of charisma demanded by heaven and therefore had to do public penitence for his sins.

As in all large far-flung states with undeveloped systems of communication, administrative centralization remained negligible; nevertheless, this did not facilitate the growth of autonomous centres of power. The dependence of the central government on its official, and these in turn on provincial assistants, enhanced traditionalism; even the 'money economy contributed to the strengthening of traditional structures'. The officials became in effect 'tax farmers', who extracted what they could from their provincial subjects, gave as little as they dared to their superiors, and kept the rest. They were prebendaries who had a paramount interest in maintaining the existing socioeconomic conditions and hence the profits from their prebends. Thus as the money economy expanded so did prebendalization, a great obstacle to attempts at internal change. To become prebendaries they were dependent on the central government; once they became officials and received their assignments, however, they acquired only a very limited power, for they remained dependent on the indigenous elements of the provinces in which they were strangers.

The sib in China was so powerful that true alienation of land from it was impossible. Land was not unconditionally or permanently sold; rather, the sib always retained the right to repurchase. There were moneylenders and other forms of politically determined capitalism but these did not lead to modern rational, capitalistic enterprise. 'There was no rational depersonalization of business,' Weber writes, 'comparable to its unmistakable beginnings in the commercial law of Italian cities.'

In China, the growth of wealth in the form of money led to different results. When officials retired, for instance, they invested their money in landholdings which enabled some of their sons to study so as to pass the state examination and thus become eligible for 'tax farming' careers of their own. In this way the whole familial community had a vested interest in the examination system and other traditional institutions. And this community was held together by powerful and rigid kinship bonds. The power of the sib rested to a large degree on the ancestor cult; ancestral spirits acted as mediators between their descendants and God. Cities were mere urban settlements of farmers and 'there remained only a technical administrative difference between city and village'. A 'city' was the seat of the mandarin and was not self-governing; a 'village' was a self-governing settlement without a mandarin. And autonomous military power developed in contrast with the West, in the villages and not in the cities.

There were repeated power struggles between the *literati* and the priests, in which the former were always victorious. Yet, ironically, the literati constantly availed themselves of the Taoist's priestly and magical services, affording Taoist heterodoxy a recognized place in religious practice. Not only were magic and animism tolerated, they were systematized and rationalized so that they became a tremendous power in Chinese life. All sciences which had empirical and naturalistic beginnings were completely rationalized as magical and supernatural practices and rituals. The Chinese world, despite its secular and rational-empirical elements, remained enchanted with a magic garden. 'Demagnification' of religion, Weber believed, was carried out in the West most consistently and thoroughly by ascetic Protestantism; but the process had begun with the ancient Jewish prophets.

This does not mean, he emphasizes, that the Puritans did not retain superstitious beliefs; what they did is obvious from their witch trials. Rather, it means that they came to regard 'all magic as devilish'. For Weber, then, one criterion of the rationalization of religion is the degree to which it has rid itself of magic.

'To be sure,' stated Weber, 'the basic characteristics of 'mentality', in this case the practical attitudes toward the world, were deeply codetermined by political and economic destinies.' Yet, in view of their autonomous laws, one can hardly fail to ascribe to these attitudes effects strongly counteractive to capitalist development.'

NOTES

5.5.3 Religion of India

In India, too, Weber saw many social and cultural conditions which, it would seem, should have given rise to modern rational capitalism. Warfare, finance and politics, for instance, had been rationalized, and the last of these even in quite 'Machiavellian' terms. Many of the older type of capitalist forms had at one time or another been in evidence: state creditors and contractors, tax farmers, etc. Urban development also seemed to parallel that of the West at many points.

In addition, what Weber called rationality was prominent in many aspects of Indian cultural life: the rational number system, arithmetic, algebra, rational science and in general a rational consistency in many spheres, together with a high degree of tolerance towards philosophical and religious doctrines.

The prevailing judicial forms appeared compatible with capitalist development; there existed an autonomous stratum of merchants; handicrafts as well as occupational specialization were developed; and, finally, the high degree of acquisitiveness and high evaluation of wealth were a notable aspect of Indian social life. He regards Indian religion as 'one factor among many' which, he states cautiously, 'may have prevented capitalistic development'.

Since there was no way of quantifying or weighing the elements, all one could do was to make as strong and as cogent a case as possible. If Indian religion had taken another form—e.g., equivalent to that of ascetic Protestantism—then, perhaps, a modern, rational type of capitalism might have developed there too. Since economic, urban, scientific and other developments were somewhat equivalent in India and the West, and modern capitalism emerged autonomously only in the latter civilization, the different religious ethos which took shape there must have made a significant causal contribution to the origin of the modern economic system.

Ultimately, however, Weber sees more operative here than just the Protestant ethic; what he sees as really crucial is that despite the rational, scientific elements in the East, and the existence there of economic strata and forms seemingly conducive to the emergence of a modern rational economy, the East remained an enchanted garden. This meant that all the aspects and institutions of Oriental civilizations were permeated and even dominated by the magical mentality, which became a brake on economic developments in particular and on rationalization of the culture as a whole.

On the other hand, occidental civilization, already in its early stages of development, had undergone significant disenchantment, which has increased almost as a uni-linear development right to the present. This disenchantment or rationalization began with the scriptural prophets; but Christianity, Greek formal logic, Roman law, the medieval papal curia, cities and states, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the various bourgeois revolutions, etc., all contributed to the process which has made Western civilization, as a whole, fundamentally different from that of the East. This is the implicit and occasionally explicit emphasis in these works.

Actually, Weber's studies of the world religions embrace much more than religious phenomena and institutions. In effect, he takes the entire social structure of the society in question into his purview. In the case of India, clearly the caste system was of fundamental importance. The origin of the four main castes or categories—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras— is shrouded in mystery; more, however, is known about the proliferation of groupings, so that literally thousands of sub-castes crystallized in the course of Indian history. Basing himself on the best Indological sources, Weber

NOTES

sketches the process by which new castes form and other undergo schisms. With the increasing wealth of some strata, numerous tasks were defined by them as 'lower' and unclean so that eventually the native, resident population refused to engage in them. This made room for alien workers, whatever their origin, who moved into these occupations and became a 'guest' people tolerated for the economic function they fulfilled. They were not at first properly a part of the host village organization; they retained their own community organizations and had full jurisdiction over them. Certain ritual barriers were raised against these guest peoples; Weber calls them a *pariah people.* Eventually, through a variety of forms of transition, a *pariah people,* having established itself in some of the formerly native Hindu occupations, develops an interest in maintaining its hold over these occupations and demands and receives certain Brahmanical services. The members of the pariah group, underprivileged anyway, come to prefer a legitimate status to that of an alien people since 'caste organizations, like quasi-trade unions, facilitate the legitimate defence of both internal and external interests of the hope and promise which Hinduism held out to these negatively privileged strata helps to explain 'their relatively minor resistance in view of what one would expect of the abysmal distance Hinduism establishes between social strata'. Clearly, this is not the place to discuss the caste phenomenon in detail; what interests us here is the role Weber assigned to caste as a factor which may have imposed structural restraints on economic development.

The caste system had essentially negative consequences for economic development; but not, as one might at first expect, primarily because it imposed restrictions and prohibitions on social interaction. Rather, it was because the caste system became totally traditionalistic and anti-rational in its effects.

That order was quite flexible in the face of the requirements of the concentration of labour in large-scale enterprises; caste proscriptions on interaction with the ritually impure were not the main impediment to industrial development. All the great religions, he suggests, have placed such restrictions on modern economy. It was the traditional, anti-rational 'spirit' of the whole social system which constituted the main obstruction; and this, along with the 'artisan's traditionalism, great in itself, was necessarily heightened to the extreme by the caste order'. The anti-rational spirit became manifest in the prevalence 'of magic and in the role of the Brahmans, whose very power was connected with the increasing significance of magic in all spheres of life'. Other religious developments had significantly modified the character of Indian economic conditions and strata. If, for example, there was an Indian 'bourgeoisie', it was very weak for at least two reasons:

(i) There was the absolute pacifism of the salvation religions, Jainism and Buddhism, which were propagated, roughly, at the same time as the development of the cities. There was a sort of causal interrelationship between urbanism and the salvation religions.

(ii) There was the undeveloped but established caste system. Both these factors blocked the development of the military power of the citizenry; pacifism blocked it in principle and the castes in practice, by 'hindering the establishment of a polis or commune in the European sense'.

The bourgeoisie as well as the guilds had no independent military organizations and therefore could be repressed whenever a prince found it expedient to do so. The Indian town enjoyed no true self-government or autonomy. Also, apart from the implications which the sacred cow had for Indian animal husbandry, magico-religious practices retarded technical and industrial development. Often 'tools were worshipped

NOTES

as quasi-fetishes' along with 'other traditional traits'. 'This stereotyping of tools was one of the strongest handicaps to all technical development.' Indian religions, including Buddhism, had attained a highly technical virtuosity but this resulted in an extreme devaluation of the world—none of them enjoined the adherent to prove himself or his grace through action or work. Quite the contrary, the highest good was a contemplative flight from the world.

Indian asceticism never translated itself into a 'methodical, rational way of life that tended in its effects to undermine traditionalism and to change the world'. Thus India, like China, remained an enchanted garden 'with all sorts of fetishism, animistic and magical beliefs and practices in rivers, ponds and mountains, highly developed word formulae, finger-pointing magic, and the like'. In contrast to the Hebrew prophets, who never made peace with the magicians, the Brahmans (a distinguished, cultivated and genteel stratum like the Mandarins), in the interests of their power position, not only recognized the influence of magic but rationalized it and made numerous concessions to the unclassical magicians; this despite the fact that ideally, according to the Classic Vedas, magic was to be suppressed, or at least merely tolerated among the masses.

The general character of Asiatic religion, Weber concluded (on the basis of his studies of China, India, Korea, Ceylon, etc.), was a particular form of gnosis, i.e., positive knowledge in the spiritual realm, mystically acquired. Gnosis was the single path to the 'highest holiness' and the 'highest practice'. This 'knowledge far from becoming a rational and empirical means by which man sought with increasing success to dominate nature became instead the means of mystical and magical domination over the self and the world by an intensive training of body and spirit either through asceticism or, as a rule, through strict, methodological ruled meditation'. It gave rise to a redemption aristocracy, for such mystical knowledge was necessarily esoteric and charismatic, hence not accessible or communicable to everyone.

The holy and godlike was attained by an 'emptying' of experience of this world. Psychic peace, not restlessness, was godlike; the latter, being specifically creature-like, was illusory, transitory and soteriologically valueless. Hence, in contrast to the soul-saving doctrines of Christianity, no emphasis was placed on 'this life'; Asiatic religion led to an otherworldliness.

'In Asia generally,' writes Weber, 'the power of a charismatic stratum grew.' The magical, anti-rational world had a profound impact on economic conduct and development could not be doubted. The depth and tenacity of this magical mentality created conditions in which the 'lust for gain' never gave rise to the modern economic system which Weber called as 'rational capitalism'. What was notably absent from Asiatic religion therefore was the development which in the Occident ultimately broke the hold of magic over the minds of men and gave rise to a 'rational, inner worldly ethic'.

5.6 CLASS, STATUS AND POWER

According to Max Weber, class refers to any group of people that is found in the same class situation. Class, in his opinion, is distinguished by the following three characteristics:

1. Individuals share a particular causal facet of life.
2. These facets are represented by economic drive, in the possession of goods and opportunities for accumulation of property.
3. Class situation is essentially market situation.

NOTES

However, it must be remembered that classes are not communities; these are only the foundations for community actions. What we refer to as 'status groups' are usually communities. Status is the positive or negative social estimation of honour and has no link with the class situation. Therefore, class is a status group. The highest prestige in society does not always belong to the richest class.

The status groups are distinguished on the basis of status symbols such as special attire, exclusive clubs and unique lifestyles. Classes are often classified depending on their relation to the means of production and acquisition of goods. Status groups are stratified according to the principle of their consumption of goods as marked by unique lifestyle. While status groups belong to the social order, classes make up the economic framework within a society.

Weber defines class in terms of two variables: *the ownership of property* and the *possession of skills that can be sold*. This provides a simple but widely applicable stratification of societies. Slave-owners, patriarchal owners of landed estates, capitalists who own companies and stocks are positively privileged, in terms of class, by virtue of property. Underneath and economically subordinated are the slaves, the peasants and serfs and the wage-earners.

Possession or non-possession of skills provides a more complex picture of stratification, in that skills are often more graduated through a society. In today's societies, the economic division of labour produces a variety of gradations in terms of types of skills in particular areas: semi-skilled, unskilled and professional skills. These gradations are not fixed, but change according to the development and dynamics of the economy, as certain skills are made redundant while new ones appear. In a medieval economy, skill differences were institutionalized through guild regulations as well as by status ascription; if one was born a peasant, one almost always remained a peasant on the lord's estate.

According to Weber, parties exist in a social club as well as state; they seek to influence communal action and acquire power. Weber acknowledged that the dimensions of economic power interact with social power. In European medieval society, status distinctions defined economic opportunities. In today's capitalistic societies, class distinctions are becoming almost completely dominant over status distinctions, and this can be seen in the inability of professional groups to defend their special skills in the face of those who control economic and financial power. This is referred to as the 'marketization' of society. Status distinctions can also be used to buttress economic class position and, conversely, economic power may be consolidated into status distinctions. Weber discusses and illustrates the interactions that occur in different periods of history and in different societies between leadership, economic power (class) and social power (status).

Though Weber never defined society, it is inferred that he considered society to consist of complex of human interrelationships characterized by meaningful behaviours of a plurality of actors. The fundamental element of sociological investigation for Weber is typical social action or even the single individual whom he called the basic unit of society. However, Weber is justifiably considered to have been one of the greatest sociologists of the 20th century for valid reasons.

First, his work provides magnificent examples of the kind of painstaking study of concrete social situations and process that must form the foundation of any adequate sociological theory. Secondly, as in the case of Durkheim, he helped to make clear the significant role of values in social life, while emphasizing the necessity of keeping social

NOTES

science value free. Thirdly, he demonstrated that much can be achieved by using the ideal type procedure in social science. Finally, he contributed enormously to the understanding of social causation and its inseparability for the problem of meaning in human affairs.

5.7 SUMMARY

- Max Weber, who has been called the 'bourgeois Marx', became a sociologist 'in a long and intense debate with the ghost of Marx'. The title of one of his major works, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, his concern with the Protestant ethic, and even his superb studies in *Weltreligionen*, all show his sustained interest in the problems and issues raised by Marx.
- Weber's entire sociology, if we accept his words at face value, was based on his conception of social action (Turner, 1983). He differentiated between action and purely reactive behaviour. The concept of behaviour is reserved, then as now (Ritzer, 1975a), to automatic behaviour that involves no thought processes—a stimulus and response. Such behaviour was not of interest in Weber's sociology.
- Weber's philosophy of science convinced him to reject deterministic systems of explanation. The causal explanations produced by sociologists should always be based on an interpretative understanding of the subjective meanings which individuals provide to their actions.
- Weber's sociological interest in the structures of authority was motivated, at least in part, by his political interests. Weber was no political radical; in fact, he was often called the 'bourgeois Marx' to reflect the similarities in the intellectual interests of Marx and Weber as well as their very different political intellectual interests of Marx.
- Legal authority can take a variety of structural forms, but the one that interested Weber most was the bureaucracy, which he considered as 'the purest type of exercise of legal authority'.
- Weber depicted bureaucracies in ideal-typical terms. Although he was well aware of their failings, Weber portrayed bureaucracies in a highly positive way.
- In his thinking about traditional authority structures, Weber used his ideal-typical bureaucracy as a methodological tool. His objective was to pinpoint the differences between a traditional authority structure and the ideal-typical bureaucracy.
- The concept of charisma plays an important role in the work of Max Weber, but he had a conception of it very different from that held by most lay people today. Even though Weber did accept that a charismatic leader may possess exceptional characteristics, his sense of charisma was more dependent on the group of followers and the manner in which they defined the charismatic leader.
- Weber termed power as the chance that a person in a social relationship may achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others. It is a very extensive definition and comprises a very big range of the types of power. To make this definition more useful for studying history and society, Weber gives domination as an alternative, or more carefully defined concept.

Check Your Progress

9. According to Weber, what were the key differences between Protestants and Catholics?
10. What did the Puritan ascetic lifestyle involve?
11. What similarities did Weber see between India and the Western countries?
12. What are the distinguishing traits of status groups?

NOTES

5.8 KEY TERMS

- **Historical sociology:** Sociological analysis based on historical data sources-either primary (such as original documents in archives) or secondary (the written history produced by historians themselves).
- **Social action:** According to Max Weber, an action is 'social' if the acting individual takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.
- **Traditional action:** Action which is carried out due to tradition, because they are always carried out in a particular manner for certain situations.
- **Affectional action:** Also known as affectual or emotional action, it is a social action caused by an emotion (revenge, love, loyalty, etc.).
- **Bureaucratization:** Tendency to manage an organization by adding more controls, adherence to rigid procedures and attention to every detail for its own sake.
- **Traditional authority:** The authority based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers that there is virtue in the sanctity of age-old rule and powers.
- **Power:** A measurement of an entity's ability to control its environment, including the behaviour of other entities.

5.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. His father was a bureaucrat who acquired a relatively significant political position. He was clearly a part of the political establishment and as a result eschewed any activity or idealism that would require personal sacrifice or threaten his position within the system. In addition, the senior Weber was a man who enjoyed earthly pleasures and in this and many other ways he stood in sharp contrast to his wife. Max Weber's mother was a devout Calvinist, a woman who sought to lead an ascetic life largely devoid of the pleasure craved by her husband. Her concerns were more otherworldly; she was disturbed by the signs of imperfection which made her insecure that she was not destined for salvation.
2. Weber was almost as critical of modern capitalism as Marx but he did not advocate revolution. He wanted to change society gradually, not overthrow it. He had little faith in the ability of the masses to accrete 'better' society.
3. Whereas legal authority stems from the legitimacy of a rational-legal system, traditional authority is based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers that there is virtue in the sanctity of age-old rule and powers. The leader in such a system is not a superior but a personal master. The administrative staff consists not of officials but mainly of personal retainers.
4. To Weber, charisma was a revolutionary force, one of the most important revolutionary forces in the social world. Whereas traditional authority clearly is inherently conservative, the rise of a charismatic leader may well pose a threat to that system (as well as to a rational-legal system) and lead to a dramatic change in that system. What distinguishes charisma as a revolutionary force is that it leads to changes in the minds of actors; it causes a 'subjective or internal reorientation'. Such changes may lead to 'a radical alteration of the central attitudes toward different problems of the World'.

NOTES

5. In this action theory, Weber's clear intent was to focus on individuals and patterns and regularities of action and not on the collectivity. Weber was prepared to admit that for some purposes, we may have to treat collectivities as individuals 'but for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since, these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action'.
6. Weber suggested four ideal types of action as the basic building blocks for sociology:
   - Instrumentally rational action
   - Value-rational action
   - Traditional action
   - Affectional action
7. Weber demarcates three fundamental types of legitimate domination: (i) traditional, (ii) charismatic and (iii) legal or rational. These three forms do not comprise the entirety of domination types but they represent how it is feasible for some individuals to exercise power over others.
8. Charisma has deficiencies as a long-term source of authority. However, it may be really effective during the lifetime of the charismatic leader. If it has to be continued, it should be transformed into a legal or traditional form of authority. Further, it might be exercised in an illogical way, preventing the development of more rational forms, particularly the ones leading to capitalism. Also, there is a chance that administration of charismatic authority results in the development of legal and rational authority. Charismatic authority gets 'routinized' in various ways. According to Weber, 'Orders are traditionalized, the staff or followers change into legal or 'estate-like' (traditional) staff, or the meaning of charisma itself may undergo change.'
9. Weber starts by drawing attention to what he considers important differences between Protestants and Catholics in terms of their inclinations towards technical, industrial, and commercial studies and occupations. Protestants were much more inclined to pursue these studies and to be engaged in capitalistic enterprise while Catholics seem to prefer the more traditional humanistic studies. Among workers, too, it appeared that Catholics remained in the more traditional occupations, e.g., crafts, while Protestants acquired industrial skills and even filled administrative positions. These differences could not be accounted for in terms of advantages of inherited wealth but rather had to be explained by the character of the religious education and values which the two groups received and communities.
10. The ascetic lifestyle involved hard work, discipline, the avoidance of waste, and the rigorous and systematic use of time. This rational and calculative attitude was applied in all aspects of life. In the Puritan worldview, eating and sexuality were seen as stimulating the bodily appetites and, therefore, as things to be controlled. Fasting, the avoidance of non-reproductive sex, and, outside marriage, a life of chastity and celibacy were all seen as means of self-control through which a mastery of the body could be attained.
11. Weber saw many social and cultural conditions in India which, it would seem, should have given rise to modern rational capitalism. Warfare, finance and politics, for instance, had been rationalized, and the last of these even in quite 'Machiavellian' terms. Many of the older type of capitalist forms had at one time or another been in evidence: state creditors and contractors, tax farmers, etc. Urban development also seemed to parallel that of the West at many points.
12. The status groups are distinguished on the basis of status symbols such as special attire, exclusive clubs and unique lifestyles. Classes are often classified depending on their relation to the means of production and acquisition of goods. Status groups are stratified according to the principle of their consumption of goods as marked by unique lifestyle. While status groups belong to the social order, classes make up the economic framework within a society.

NOTES

5.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. In what way did the differences between his parents affect the early life of Weber?
2. Why is Weber known as 'bourgeois Marx'?
3. State the concept of social action enunciated by Weber.
4. Give a brief note on the transition from tradition to rationality depicted by Weber.
5. What were the features of religions in China and India that stifled the chances of growth of capitalism during the initial phases?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Compare and contrast the four types of social action given by Weber.
2. Compare and contrast different types of authority propounded by Weber.
3. Give a broad overview of the connection between religion and the rise of modern capitalism.
4. Discuss the salient features of Weber's theory of power.
5. Analyse the basic characteristics of Weberian bureaucracy.
6. Elucidate the differences between charismatic authority and legal rational authority.

5.11 FURTHER READING

Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.

Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Boguardus, Emory S. 1969. *The Development of Social Theory*. Mumbai: Vakils, Feffa and Simons.

Jayapalan, J. 2001. *Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Ritzer, George. 1988. *Sociological Theory*, Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.