



**MA (Sociology)**  
**SECOND SEMESTER**  
**MASOC 405**



**INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**  
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**CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS**

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**PART-II**

**MA [Sociology]**

**Second Semester**

**MASOC-405**



**RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY**

**Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112**

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## 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.

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# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

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## Classical Sociological Thinkers

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### Syllabi

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#### Unit I: Emile Durkheim

Division of Labour, Social Fact, Rules of Sociological Methods,  
Sociology of Religion, Theory of Suicide.

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#### Unit II: Emile Durkheim

Division of Labour, Social Fact, Rules of Sociological Methods,  
Sociology of Religion, Theory of Suicide.

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#### Unit III: Max Weber

Rationality and Bureaucracy, Ideal Types, Social Action, Power,  
Authority and Legitimacy.

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#### Unit IV: Max Weber

Theory Protestant Ethics and Theory of capitalism, Class, Status and  
Party

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# CONTENTS

## UNIT 1 EMILE DURKHEIM

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Brief Biography
- 1.3 Division of Labour
- 1.4 Social Fact
- 1.5 Rules of Sociological Methods
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 Key Terms
- 1.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 1.9 Questions and Exercises
- 1.10 Further Reading

## UNIT 2 EMILE DURKHEIM

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Brief Biography
- 2.3 Sociology of Religion
- 2.4 Theory of Suicide
- 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 MAX WEBER

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 Rationality and Bureaucracy
- 3.3 Social Action
  - 3.3.1 Ideal Types
- 3.4 Power, Authority and Legitimacy
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Key Terms
- 3.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.8 Questions and Exercises
- 3.9 Further Reading

## UNIT 4 MAX WEBER

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 Theory of Protestant Ethics and Capitalism
  - 4.2.1 Religion and Social Change
  - 4.2.2 Religion of China
  - 4.2.3 Religion of India
- 4.3 Class, Status and Power
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 Key Terms
- 4.5 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.6 Questions and Exercises

# 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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 EMILE DURKHEIM

## Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Brief Biography
- 1.3 Division of Labour
- 1.4 Social Fact
- 1.5 Rules of Sociological Methods
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 Key Terms
- 1.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 1.9 Questions and Exercises
- 1.10 Further Reading

## NOTES

### 1.0 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'.

1.1 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

1.2 BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Emile Durkheim was born on 15 April, 1858 in Epinal, France. He was the descendant 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 furor 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'Année 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.

### 1.3 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, reveals 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.

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 characteristic 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 the phenomenon through which he has examined the growth of the division of labour in modern societies.

## NOTES

## 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 his functions 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.

## 1.4 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:

### Check Your Progress

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

## 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 led 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.

### 1.5 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.

**Check Your Progress**

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

## NOTES

## 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.

## 1.6 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

## NOTES

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.

## 1.7 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

### 1.8 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

## 1.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### NOTES

#### 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.

## 1.10 FURTHER READING

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## UNIT 2 EMILE DURKHEIM

### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Brief Biography
- 2.3 Sociology of Religion
- 2.4 Theory of Suicide
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Key Terms
- 2.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.8 Questions and Exercises
- 2.9 Further Reading

### NOTES

### 2.0 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'.

2.1 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

2.2 BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Emile Durkheim was born on 15 April, 1858 in Epinal, France. He was the descendant 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 furor 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'Année 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.

**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

## 2.3 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.

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.

### Check Your Progress

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

## 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:

(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

## 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'.

## 2.4 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.

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.

### 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?

## NOTES

## 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 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 of 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 is 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 choked 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.

## 2.5 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 non-material.
- 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

### 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.

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.

## 2.6 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

## 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

## 2.7 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

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, 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.

### 3.1 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

### 3.2 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).

## 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

## 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 patriarchy 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

## NOTES

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.

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.

### 3.3 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

#### 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

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.

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 interactionism, 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.

#### 3.3.1 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

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.

## NOTES

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.

## 3.4 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

## 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 through 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 issue 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.

#### 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

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'.

## NOTES

## 3.5 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?

## 3.6 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.

## 3.7 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

## 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'

## NOTES

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.

### 3.8 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.

### 3.9 FURTHER READING

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## NOTES

## UNIT 4 MAX WEBER

## NOTES

## Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 Theory of Protestant Ethics and Capitalism
  - 4.3.1 Religion and Social Change
  - 4.2.2 Religion of China
  - 4.2.3 Religion of India
- 4.3 Class, Status and Power
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 Key Terms
- 4.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.7 Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Reading

## 4.0 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—itsself 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.

#### 4.1 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

## NOTES

## NOTES

## NOTES

**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?

## 4.2 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

## 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 ethic 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.

#### 4.2.1 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.

#### 4.2.2 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 and 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

## NOTES

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.'



### 4.2.3 Religion of India

#### NOTES

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 Brahmins, 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 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'.

### 4.3 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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

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.

## NOTES

## 4.4 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?

## 4.5 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.

## 4.6 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

## 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'

## NOTES

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.

## 4.7 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.

## 4.8 FURTHER READING

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