



**Department of Distance Education  
Punjabi University, Patiala**

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**M. A. (POLITICAL SCIENCE) PART II  
(Semester-III)**

**OPTION - I  
(POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY)**

**UNIT NO. : 1**

**Lesson No.**

- 1.1 : Political Sociology : Nature and Emergence
- 1.2 : Max Weber : Social Action : Meaning and Types
- 1.3 : Marxian Approach to Political Sociology
- 1.4 : Talcott Parsons : Structural-Functional Approach

**POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY: NATURE AND EMERGENCE**

**STRUCTURE**

**1.1.0 Objectives**

**1.1.1 Meaning and Nature of Political Sociology**

**1.1.2 Emergence of Political Sociology**

**1.1.3 Summary**

**1.1.4 Key Concepts/Words**

**1.1.5 Exercise Questions**

**1.1.6 Short Questions**

**1.1.7 Reading List**

**1.1.0 Objectives**

By the end of this chapter, the student shall be able to:

- To understand the meaning and nature of political sociology.
- To explore how political sociology emerged as a discipline.

**1.1.1 Meaning and Nature of Political Sociology**

Political sociology seeks to understand systematically the underlying social forces that determine the shape and lines of movement of political life. Political sociology represents the discipline which seeks an understanding of the political world through the sociological bases of political action.

Political sociology in India is a relatively recent development. As academic discipline, both politics and sociology existed in relative indifference towards each other till the sixties, although much that was excellent in social and political analysis was of course spontaneously interdisciplinary sociological interest in politics scientists seeking help from sociological theories began through an appreciation of inadequacy in conventional studies of political facts. Political science emerged as a discipline in Indian universities in the late thirties.

To understand politics, it is essential; therefore to look at some of the enduring forms of social organization in India two of these durable modes of identify are religion and caste.

Crick argues that politics depends on some settled order. Small groups are part of that order. They may help to create politics, but their internal behavior is not political simply because their individual function is different from that of the state itself. Politics then is about the condition of order, and crick later makes it plan that this refers to a conciliation process within states.

The job of political sociology would be the analysis of the institutions of the state as Greer and Greens put it (but less strongly than crick) the major empirical problem of political sociology today would seem, then, to be the description, analysis and sociological explanation of the peculiar social structure called the state.

Political Sociology stresses the presence of politics in almost all social relations thesis the view which emphasizes the ideas of politics being about the utilization and the development of power, and since power is generated in almost every social group and institution, politics is thus more pervasive than is granted on the first view.

This opposite extreme to Crick is perhaps illustrated by Harold Lasswell, who suggests that the 'the unifying frame of reference for the special student of politics is the rich and variable meaning of "influence and the influential. "Power and the powerful, this viewpoint is within the sociological tradition which tends to understand power, authority and influence as characteristic social control processes, and not unique to an particular type of social group. Fathers can exercise power in the family just as foremen and supervisors can exercise it over workers in a factory

As Dahl defines, a political system is any persistent pattern of human relationship than involves, to a significant extent, power, rule or authority.

The study of politics, then, is concerned with understanding all the problems pertaining to power and its use in societal context, its relative 'amount', its structuring and legitimating within group of various kinds, and so on.

In practice, however, political sociologists tend to concentrate the attention on 'power behavior in so far as its relevant to understanding the way political system work. In sort, we are adopting the position that political sociology is a branch of sociology that is mainly concerned with analysis of the interaction between politics and society

Politics is about 'power'; politics occurs when there are differential in power or authority. Power occurs in all societies and if we equate politics with power relations then politics also is endemic to social life.

Political sociology is concerned with power in its social context. By power is meant here the ability of an individual or a social group to pursue a course of action (to make and implement decisions, and more broadly to determine the agenda for decision making) if necessary against the interests and even against the oppositions of other individual and groups.

Political sociology, in short, is treated as a branch of sociology that is mainly concerned with the study of the interaction between Society and politics. Political sociologists likewise are interested in observing the ways in which the society affects the state. "Political sociology, according to Bendix and Lipset, starts with society and examines how it affects the state". Theodore Caplow has observed, "It is characteristic of the social sciences as the physical sciences that a borderline field develops between every two major disciplines when work is done that involves both of them Thus, political sociology deals with such topics as the relation between political power and class structure".

Professor Lipset has defined political sociology, "as the study of the inter-relationship between society and polity, between social structure and political institution...Political Sociology is not solely the study of the social factors that the condition the political order. Indeed political institutions are themselves social structures, and hence the often independent (that is, causal) factors that affect non-political social structure".

Since the inception of the science of sociology the study of political institutions and behavior attracted the attention of the sociologist. "Politics is an important problem area of social scientists, because it is the most rationally organized expression of man's consciousness, as well

as sphere where vital discussions affecting man are consummated” those who are interested in political activities try to explain the interrelationship between social and the political. The political process in other works is to be studied as a particular form of psychological and sociology relationship.

Political sociologists assume that the entire that the political system is one of the many dimensions of the entire social order. It is not only intelligible as a set of legal rules and institutions. The political groups and the legal order should be viewed in the perspective of all other groups and institution which make the social order. The form and content of the political system are not necessary alike in different societies. They vary with the form and content of the religion family and order systems in a society.

Many political scientists have realized that the political process cannot be studied except as special cases of more general sociologist and psychological relationship. “We will recall that Aristotle also takes this as fundamental premise, that a government can be understood only in relation to the social whole of which it forms an aspect.

Political sociology, briefly speaking treats government and politics as dependent variables, the government is influenced by such factors as collective behavior, growth and decline of population, class conflict and many such sociological factors, the political or governmental measures, on the other hand like. Taxation, changes in political leadership, ideological necessarily affect the social order. The political sociologists endeavor the read the complex relationship between polity and society.

The polity or the political organizations are embedded within the social order and therefore, questions related to political order cannot be avoided while writing about the society. “Political sociologist came to argue that the state is just one of many political institutions, and political institutions are one of many cluster of social and that the relationship among these institution and clusters of social institutions is subject of sociology in general, and that the relationship between political institutions and other institutions is the special province of political sociology.

The field of political sociology can be divided into three broad areas:

**1. Social foundations of the political order-** especially the way political arrangements depend upon social organization and culture value political sociological is concerned with the underlying support of the political institutions rather than with formal aspects of government. The political order is mainly concerned with the regulation of the struggle for power and the political sociology considers basic constitutional questions.

**2. The social bases of political behavior-** this refers to the behavior associated with voting holding of political opinion, membership in political associations, and participating of supporting political movement.

**3. Social aspects of the political process:** in includes the study of role of interest groups, parties and movement in the stability and change in political order, political sociology studies the interaction pattern of organized groups in politics.

According to McKee, the field of political sociology includes:

- a. an understanding of the organization of social power into political structures that relate significantly to other structures and institutions of the society;
- b. the social conditions under which a democratic order can prevail;

- c. relations of class to political order;
- d. the elites and their relation to power and the political process; and
- e. extremism of either left or the right or both, which threatens established order and brings conflict and cleavage into the open and make it part of the political struggle.

Political sociology is a very old subject. As a major field in the discipline it has, however, emerged after World War II. Sociology of politics focus their research on a variety of questions, what conditions in society promote political systems regarded as legitimate by the citizens why some political systems stable are and others unstable? Why are some government democratic and others totalitarian and still others a mixture of the two? What determines variations in the party system, levels of political participation and rates of voting?

In their attempts to study all these phenomena they use the methods of comparative analysis of social system, analysis of survey data, historical description and participant observation. According to Lipset, "one of political sociology's prime concern in an analysis of the social condition making for democracy"

For a period of nearly 200 years between the 17th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, political sociologist, like Bodin, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, saint-Simon, Proudhon, Marx, Hegel, loins von between the state and society as a result of the collapse of emergence of the bourgeoisie as a new phenomenon.

These fathers of political sociology were divided into two and distinct camps on the question of the relative importance of state and society. But the controversy could ultimately be solved only when the political sociologist arrived at the consensus that instead of discussing the relative importance and legitimacy of state and society, the proper approach would be to treat the political institutions as one of the many clusters of social institutions.

Contemporary sociologist theorist, like Talcot parsons, for example, argues that there cannot be any specialized conceptual scheme, for the study of politics. The political problem of social system is a focus for the integration of all its analytically distinguished components, not of a specially differentiated class of components. The debate between the supporters of the state and those of society has come to a close and with the solution of the dilemma, political sociologist have outgrown the long standing controversy. But although the subjects of controversy are no longer referred to as state, and society the underlying dilemma, the proper balance between conflict and consensus continues.

Professor Gabriel Almond is more comprehensive in his approach to political sociologist than Professor Lipset. The latter describes, with the help of the examples taken from various European and non-European societies, the material and efficient causes of a particular kind of democracy. Professor Almond, by contrast, presents a sketch of a general theory of the final formal efficient and material causes of a all political systems and applies it to a comparative analysis of the changing political of Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, the near-east and the Latin America"

Almond has studied the political system, functions, roles, structure and political socialization. These are the replacement of such term as state, power, office, institutions, and public opinion, and citizenship training respectively. Such replacement, according to Almond, is necessary "to create a new set of study of non western societies, because they are narrowly legalistic, parochial and were developed out of pre-democratic European political experience.

Almond has given a functional approach to the study of the political system. According to this approach, the political system is to be viewed as a system attempts unify society either by transforming it into another or by maintaining the existing way of life

Almond has found in all function which a political system must perform:

1. to the socialization and recruitment function educating the members of the society in the spirit of the regime and in the performance of political role);
2. interest articulation function (development the mechanism for expressing claims of demands for political action) ;
3. Interest aggregation function devices for consolidating individual claims in group of claims such as parties and pressure groups);
4. Political communication function ( a communication system must exit to facilitate all the other function);
5. 6. 7. Rule making, rule application and rule adjudication function, which mean the systems, must have procedures for making authoritative rules, applying them to particular cases and dealing with conflicts about the specific meaning and the application of the rules.

The seven functions are to be studied in order to know about the actual regimes. This best regime is the one that is best in producing unity because the integration of society is the main function of a political system.

Structures of a political system which are significant for interest articulations are

1. Groups within formal governmental bodies- legislative blocs( institutions interest groups);
2. Groups which arise out of non- political concerns and become politically active- ethane, religious, class groups (non-associations groups);
3. Rioting groups and spontaneous mobs (anomie interest groups); and
4. Organization specially created for the purpose of articulating interest- manufacturers' associations and trade unions (associational interest groups). Interest articulation and interest aggregation or the procedures for the most efficient order.

Another significant search for the student of political system is to find out the style of interest articulation in order to understand the proper functioning of the political system- the relationship between society and polity and the circulation of needs, claims and demands from the society in agreeable form into the political system. According to Almond, the style of interest articulation which goes with associational interest group is superior to other styles. The functionalist approach of almond admits the meaningfulness of taking of "is superior to other style. The functions approach a almond admits the systems, and to frame an idea of the best polity as one which produces, the highest degree of unity.

Political sociologists are interest in explaining and knowing why human beings behave in a particular way so far politics is concerned. This is however, the characteristic of all other behavioral sciences. It is necessary, therefore, for the political scientist t enquire about the inter-relationship of society and political. This, of course, does not mean than political events should be considered as by- products of social events- rather it is an investigation into the inter-relationship between the two.

Political institutions are embedded in social system and they have much bearing on the social network, it is therefore, necessary to study the impact of the traditional political producers and organization – election administration- on the society of which they form, a part.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the political societies are not chaotic. They observe some regularity and such regulations can be found, for example between a two party system and single member constituencies, and between economic development and political stability. With the help of a set of general theoretical propositions, these regularities could be predicted or deduced.

Marx, for instance, developed a theory of social classes which explains the consciousness among the people belonging to the same class. In other words, the theory explains the position of an individual in the economic structure makes him develop common interests with others belonging to the same position. This theory, to a large extent, can explain the regularity found between social classes and voting preference.

The theorists, in social sciences are often vague and inadequately constructed. They are not strictly worked out with the aid of mathematics. As we find in the theorists of physical sciences, there is a definite dearth of theorists in social science and the existing theories are not closely linked with the real world. The political sociologist, therefore, instead of being disheartened with the existing situation, should endeavour to build up theories with the help of conceptual approaches used by the sociologists, which consider the social order as a network of social relationship susceptible to exploration with the help of such concepts as socialization, values, norms, roles, etc.

Political sociologists, unlike historians, are more interested in building theories and seeking the relevance of events of facts with the theory rather than events themselves. This does not, however, mean that the political sociologist ignore the past. On the contrary, the study of the contemporary political life is done with reference to the past. In order to give a historical explanation of the present political order, the study of the past order becomes necessary.

The events of the past can be treated as benchmark data for testing the general propositions. Eminent personalities in the field of politics sociology like Marx, Max Weber, Mosca, and Lipset have formulated their model for studying the political aspect of society on data extracted from the past world.

Political sociologists, in brief, are substantially concerned with the problem of social order and political obedience. Political sociology can be a study of political behavior within a sociologist framework “it should be clear that sociology of politics is not a substitute for traditional political science... sociology of politics attempts to get beyond and behind, legal and historical analysis of the structural and dynamic elements of society which bear upon its governmental institutions.

### **1.1.2 Emergence of Political Sociology**

It is perhaps odd that modern political science should be as new an academic subject as it is; politics, after all, have been studied since before Aristotle, and political behavior, if not as old as the objects of natural science, is never the-less older than natural science itself. This newness, however, may be traced to the fact that the sociology of politics pre-supposes a distinction between the political and the social which is still recent in the history of ideas. To see the

emergence of the distinction we shall have to look briefly at some aspect of the story of European political thought but it also worth remembering how much of what we now mean when we talk about 'politics' is, in terms of European history, very recent indeed.

The principal change, of course, has been the enormous extension of the political over the last 150 years. Universal suffrages, large-scale bureaucracy, mass parties, are all recent institutions. Universal suffrage, it is as well to remember, dates in England only from 1929, in France from 1945 and in Belgium from 1949, Marx was dead before even the third reform bill of 1885. Bentham, the foremost of the early champions of universal suffrage, died the day before the reform bill of 1832, received the royal assent. Bagehot's classic study *The English Constitution* was written under the imminence of the extended franchise of 1867 not based on an observation if it's working. France did have manhood suffrage for the whole second half of the nineteenth century, but nobody systematically studied how it operated; Proudhon, who remained the strongest doctrinal influence on French radical politics until after the commune, merely dismissed it in a typical mixture of stillness and insight as a device to make the people lie'. Only in the united states can poetical democracy be regarded as an institution of reputedly long standing: Tocqueville's famous study, *Democracy in America*, which he conceived after the fall of Charles X in 1830 and completed a decade later, remains the lonely forerunner of all our twentieth-century pre-occupations with 'mass society'.

It is the same with the study of political parties. The two classics- Ostrogorski's *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* and Michel's *Political Parties* – appeared only at or after the turn of the century. The first study of the single party as a political institution did not appear until 1936. Even the topic of bureaucracy, though it is, like popular despotism, a worry to be found in mill on liberty, became a subject of generalized theoretical inquiry only with max Weber.

One can, it is true, trace modern sociological methods right back to the 'Political Arithmetic' of the seventeenth century, when sir William Petty, a professor of anatomy at Oxford who extended his interest also to the body politic, wrote his remarkable work on *The Political Anatomy of Ireland*. But modern statistical methods developed only in the late nineteenth century, and many are still more recent than this, the first international statistical congress did not meet until 1853; its chairman was the Belgian astronomer Quenelle, who was not a sociologist by origin, but only later in his career took from Laplace the idea of applying probability theory to statistics about human populations. Sampling theory came into its own only shortly before the turn of the century, and techniques of statistical correlation only thereafter. In the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* during this period, there is a surprising amount of what nowadays would be called quantitative politics or sociology.

But if we are really to understand the institutions and ideas which brought modern political sociology into being we should properly go much farther back than this, we should, in fact, go right back to the period between Garson and Grotius which J.N. Figgis, in a classic series of lectures delivered at Cambridge in 1900, first fully recognized as crucial. Between the failure of the Conciliar Movement at the beginning of the fifteenth century and the success of the Netherlands revolt some two hundred years later, the notion of territorial sovereignty had superseded the traditional belief in the theocratic unity of Christendom, and there had thereby begun to emerge the essential distinction, unthinkable in their middle ages, between society and

the state. Aristotle's *politics* exercised an increasing influence from the mid thirteenth century onwards, and many of his generalization (such as that a large middle class is the best guarantee against revolution) are precisely the sort of assertions that a modern political sociologist would dignify by the title of hypotheses. There is, however, an all-important difference. There is, in Aristotle, no distinction between social and political relation. To ask either what is or should be the relation between society and the state is a question which could become meaningful only after the emergence of the modern idea of the state as such. This, as Figgis saw, must be principally credited to what can be called the unconscious alliance between Machiavelli and Luther.

Once, after this, the distinction begins to be realized, it should be possible to ask the question: which determines which? Is it, as sometimes implied by Machiavelli, the state (or rather, the statecraft of the prince) by which society is molded, or is it, as explicitly stated in Marx, society which determines the form and nature of the state? The proper answer, of course, is that there is a reciprocal relation between the two; and it was perhaps Montesquieu who was the first important author to show an awareness of this, though there are hints of it even in Bodin. Montesquieu, for all the muddles rightly detected by his critics, saw both that social determinants affect the nature of government and also that society can be changed by precisely those rulers who understand the social determinants. Hobbes, for example, in spite of all his hard-headed nominalism, is not a political sociologist as we would now understand the term. His social contract is not a sociological hypothesis but a historical model.

Rousseau's famous contrast between man and citizen, fundamental though it is, is a contrast between man in a state of nature and man in civil society rather than between political man and social man. Similarly, Adam Ferguson, whose *History of Civil Society* was published four years after Rousseau's *Social Contract*, is sometimes excitedly claimed as the true precursor of modern sociology; but although (in a later work) he does define society as a generic term including both family and nation, this is only, like Aristotle or Aquinas or Althusius, to see the state as the all-embracing association and the family as a lesser one. Ferguson does not any more than Rousseau, properly distinguish social from political relations as such.

Saint-Simon is nowadays rightly conceded with intellectual priority over the actual inventor of the term 'sociology', his one-time associate Auguste Comte. All the intellectual preoccupations of the nineteenth century are foreshadowed in his writing: positivism, historicism, internationalism, industrialism, technocracy. Moreover, he was the first to see (for which Marx and Engels did give him some credit) that the economic structure of society is in some sense the basis for the form of the state: although (unlike Marx) he saw all institutions as the product of ideas. What Saint-Simon does is to try to take the politics out of government rather than describe how the governmental and political is related to the administrative and social.

Society, says Paine, is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness. Political government, says Godwin, is 'that brute engine which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind'.

None of the anarchist writers (among whom even Proudhon should be included, although he preferred to call himself a 'socialist' realized that some form of political association is necessary to make societies possible at all, and that political relation must therefore co-exist with social relations although they need not necessarily overlap with them. Proudhon, for instance, thought

that he could do away with what he meant by 'the state' and yet have constitutional guarantees for the rights that he wished to see recognized by society all the anarchists, both before and after saint-Simon, made a mistake very similar to this. They quite properly distinguished co-operation from coercion, and administration from government; but they went on from this (as Marx did, but from different premises) to advocate a sort of non-political government without seeing that this is either a contradiction in terms or else an unargued over optimism about human nature.

Social organization presupposes that some people have some power over some other people who are recognized by enough of all the people as legitimate; and thus competition for power must somehow be regulated or institutionalized. An understanding of how social in-situations co-exist with political is much more evident in Tocqueville's discussion of the importance of voluntary associations in American democracy.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, which he published in 1821, Hegel takes explicit pains to warn us against confusing the state with 'civil society'. He also emphasizes that 'particular interests which are common to everyone fall within civil society a die outside the absolutely universal interest of the state proper'.

Hegel's error is that although he appears to be saying that civil society is something separate, he at the same time makes the state's interest 'absolutely universal' by definition. He means not that civil society is something separate from the state, but rather that without the state civil society is incomplete, for Hegel civil society is simply a lesser form of state. He subsumes society under the state as a sort of inferior predicate, very much as Comte subsumes the state under society. Hegel means in fact too much by 'the state' he seems sometimes (though by no means always) to understand by it more what Malinowski means by 'culture' or Durkheim means by the 'collective consciousness' it still, of course, retains its inherently political meaning; but this is just the trouble. Hegel never saw that the social and political can co-exist in juxtaposition or even in opposition. And that the problem to be considered is the relation between the political and the separate, non-political elements in civil society.

The first demolition took some time in fact, a decade after Hegel was dead; but when it happened it happened with a bang. Elsewhere in Europe the early 1840's were also yielding a startling crop of important works: in France, Comte brought out the final volume of his *Course De Philosophies Positive*, and Proudhon issued his famous pronouncement that *Property is Theft*; in England, J.S. Mill brought out his *System of Logic*, whose sixth book contains what is still a standard discussion of method in social science. But it was in Germany that the ferment was most intense. Not only Marx but also Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Stern and von Stein produced works between 1841 conscious, definitive and explicit replacement of the Hegelian system

'But what', asks Weber, 'is a "political" association from the sociological point of view? What is a state? Sociologically, the state cannot be defined in terms of what it does. There is scarcely any task that some political association has not taken in hand, and there is no task that one could say has always been exclusive and peculiar to those associations which are designated as political. Ultimately, one can give a sociological definition of the modern state only in terms of the specific means peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely, the use of physical force. If the only social institutions which existed did not know the use of violence, then the concept of "state

“would disappear, and there would emerge what could be designated “anarchy” in the specific sense of the word. A state is a human community which successfully claims within a given territory the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force. Hence, politics” means to us striving to share power or to influence to distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state. When a question is said to be a “political” question, what is always meant is that the decisive criterion for its answer in interests in the distribution, maintenance or transfer of power.

Professor Sachapera, in his lectures on *Government and Politics on Tribal Societies* (1956) stresses that the public life of the Bergdama or the bushmen, though not fulfilling Weber’s definition of a ‘state’, is still subject to a definite system of control, and is neither chaotic nor casual in operation’.

Durkheim is known chiefly for his work on topics more social than political suicide, religion, the division of labor, and the methods and philosophy of social science. He did write three studies of political thinkers- Montesquieu, Rousseau and Saint-Simon-where his elegance and cogency of argument are shown in some ways to best advantage; but on the whole he was much less concerned with politics than Weber was. He did, however, in his long unpublished lectures on *Professional Ethic and Civil Morals*, discuss at some length the definition of the state. None the less, it reads almost as though it were specifically directed against Weber’s definition: ‘Where’, says Durkheim, ‘cardinal importance attaches to national territory, it is of comparatively recent date. To begin with, it seems rather arbitrary to deny any political character to the great nomad societies whose structure was sometimes very elaborate.’

Durkheim does, however, make two essential points. First of all, he stresses that a patriarchal family, though it may be a social unit containing both governors and governed, is not a state; secondly, he emphasizes that the idea of the state presupposes the existence of other social groupings under it. Durkheim’s actual definition of the state is not what we want, since it involves his own suspect notion of ‘collective representation’ however. The essentially public aspect of the state (and the political) is brought out by him.

To define the state by what it does is dangerous not only because of Weber’s point that there is scarcely anything the state does not do. It is also dangerous on simple logical grounds. If the state is defined- which rests rather on means – if a state ceases to retain its recognized monopoly of force then we wish to say it is no longer a state? But beyond this, there are obvious snag. When, for instance, Hobhouse (writing in 1924) defines the state as ‘the community organized for certain (governmental) purposes he land himself back in the Durkheim did with Comte) he started out by criticizing. Of course, it is Hothouse’s ‘community’ which makes his definition particularly flaccid, for (just as with Hegel) it enables him quietly to by-pass the problem of legitimacy which Weber rightly emphasize. But even if he had defined the state only as that part of the community which does certain things for certain purposes, the weakness of such a definition remains: sooner or later (unless the definition is tautological one will find a state that does not do them or some other institution that does but that cannot be convincingly described as political. Hobhouse is one of those authors who would have been a much better sociologist if he had been a better philosopher, and vice versa: and perhaps the moral to be drawn is that one

should always be a little suspicious when a sociological definition of the state is offered in support of what is going to be a philosophical argument.

Professor Gabriel Almond, writing in 1966, what we [professors Almond and Coleman] propose is that the political system is that system in interactions to be found in all independent societies which performs the functions of integration and adaptation (both internally and vis a vis other societies) by means of the employment, or threat of employment, of more or less legitimate physical compulsion.

Political sociology is therefore all those institutions and behavior which on the basis of the foregoing discussion can be labeled 'political' (this will include the reciprocal relations between the political and the social (in the sense of all other 'social' institutions and behaviors not subsumed also under the political)). The political is thus not entailed by the social, both the coercive and the public.

The emergence of politics not only as an autonomous but also an empirical study, and though the two more or less coincide in Marx's refutation of Hegel the issues involved are very different. The most remorseless empiricism still cannot make politics a science in the strict positivistic sense, and while the autonomy of political studies has been a useful development it has, perhaps, been partly responsible for the positivistic excesses of some of its practitioners, the logical relation between a (more or less empirical) proposition in political sociology and a (more or less prescriptive) proposition in political philosophy is a complicate and intractable problem. Political theory remains a separate, philosophical discipline which neither the positivism of political science nor that of linguistic analysis has outmoded, though; they both may have been very good for it. On the other hand, that there has always been a necessary link between empirical conclusions about politics and political theories (or philosophies) is the central theme of these essays.

### **CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

1. Elaborate how political sociology emerges as a discipline?

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2. Discuss in detail the nature of political sociology?

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#### **1.1.3 Summary**

Political sociology seeks to understand systematically the underlying social forces that determine the shape and lines of movement of political life. Political sociology represents the discipline which seeks an understanding of the political world through the sociological bases of political action. Political sociology in India is a relatively recent development. As academic discipline, both politics and sociology existed in relative indifference towards each other till the sixties, although much that was excellent in social and political analysis was of course spontaneously interdisciplinary sociological interest in politics scientists seeking help from sociological theories began through an appreciation of inadequacy in conventional studies of political facts. Political science emerged as a discipline in Indian universities in the late thirties.

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Theodore Caplow has observed, "It is characteristic of the social sciences as the physical sciences that a borderline field develops between every two major disciplines when work is done that involves both of them. Thus, political sociology deals with such topics as the relation between political power and class structure".

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**1. Social foundations of the political order**

**2. The social bases of political behavior**

**3. Social aspects of the political process**

According to McKee, the field of political sociology includes:

- a. an understanding of the organization of social power into political structures that relate significantly to other structures and institutions of the society;
- b. the social conditions under which a democratic order can prevail;
- c. relations of class to political order;
- d. the elites and their relation to power and the political process; and
- e. extremism of either left or the right or both, which threatens established order and brings conflict and cleavage into the open and make it part of the political struggle.

Almond has given a functional approach to the study of the political system. According to this approach, the political system is to be viewed as a system attempts unify society either by transforming it into another or by maintaining the existing way of life

Almond has found in all function which a political system must perform:

1. to the socialization and recruitment function (educating the members of the society in the spirit of the regime and in the performance of political role);
2. interest articulation function (development the mechanism for expressing claims of demands for political action) ;

3. Interest aggregation function devices for consolidating individual claims in group of claims such as parties and pressure groups);
4. Political communication function ( a communication system must exist to facilitate all the other function);
5. 6. 7. Rule making, rule application and rule adjudication function, which mean the systems, must have procedures for making authoritative rules, applying them to particular cases and dealing with conflicts about the specific meaning and the application of the rules.

The seven functions are to be studied in order to know about the actual regimes. This best regime is the one that is best in producing unity because the integration of society is the main function of a political system.

It is perhaps odd that modern political science should be as new an academic subject as it is; politics, after all, have been studied since before Aristotle, and political behavior, if not as old as the objects of natural science, is never the-less older than natural science itself. This newness, however, may be traced to the fact that the sociology of politics pre-supposes a distinction between the political and the social which is still recent in the history of ideas. To see the emergence of the distinction we shall have to look briefly at some aspect of the story of European political thought but it also worth remembering how much of what we now mean when we talk about 'politics' is, in terms of European history, very recent indeed.

#### **1.1.4 Key Concepts/Words**

**Political Sociology:** Political sociology seeks to understand systematically the underlying social forces that determine the shape and lines of movement of political life. Political sociology represents the discipline which seeks an understanding of the political world through the sociological bases of political action. Political Sociology stresses the presence of politics in almost all social relations thesis the view which emphasizes the ideas of politics being about the utilization and the development of power, and since power is generated in almost every social group and institution, politics is thus more pervasive than is granted on the first view.

Political sociology is concerned with power in its social context. By power is meant here the ability of an individual or a social group to pursue a course of action (to make and implement decisions, and more broadly to determine the agenda for decision making) if necessary against the interests and even against the oppositions of other individual and groups. Political sociology, in short, is treated as a branch of sociology that is mainly concerned with the study of the interaction between Society and politics. Political sociologists likewise are interested in observing the ways in which the society affects the state. "Political sociology, according to Bendix and Lipset, starts with society and examines how it affects the state". Theodore Caplow has observed , "It is characteristic of the social sciences as the physical sciences that a borderline field develops between every two major disciplines when work is done that involves both of them . Thus, political sociology deals with such topics as the relation between political power and class structure".

Professor Lipset has defined political sociology, "as the study of the inter-relationship between society and polity, between social structure and political institution...Political Sociology is not solely the study of the social factors that the condition the political order. Indeed political

institutions are themselves social structures, and hence the often independent (that is, causal) factors that affect non-political social structure”.

**Field of Political Sociology:** The field of political sociology can be divided into three broad areas:

**1. Social foundations of the political order-** especially the way political arrangements depend upon social organization and culture value political sociological is concerned with the underlying support of the political institutions rather than with formal aspects of government. The political order is mainly concerned with the regulation of the struggle for power and the political sociology considers basic constitutional questions.

**2. The social bases of political behavior-** this refers to the behavior associated with voting holding of political opinion, membership in political associations, and participating of supporting political movement.

**3. Social aspects of the political process:** in includes the study of role of interest groups, parties and movement in the stability and change in political order, political sociology studies the interaction pattern of organized groups in politics.

According to McKee, the field of political sociology includes:

- a. an understanding of the organization of social power into political structures that relate significantly to other structures and institutions of the society;
- b. the social conditions under which a democratic order can prevail;
- c. relations of class to political order;
- d. the elites and their relation to power and the political process; and
- e. extremism of either left or the right or both, which threatens established order and brings conflict and cleavage into the open and make it part of the political struggle.

**Almond's approach to political System:** Almond has given a functional approach to the study of the political system. According to this approach, the political system is to be viewed as a system attempts unify society either by transforming it into another or by maintaining the existing way of life

Almond has found in all function which a political system must perform:

1. to the socialization and recruitment function educating the members of the society in the spirit of the regime and in the performance of political role);
2. interest articulation function (development the mechanism for expressing claims of demands for political action) ;
3. Interest aggregation function devices for consolidating individual claims in group of claims such as parties and pressure groups);
4. Political communication function ( a communication system must exit to facilitate all the other function);
5. 6. 7. Rule making, rule application and rule adjudication function, which mean the systems, must have procedures for making authoritative rules, applying them to particular cases and dealing with conflicts about the specific meaning and the application of the rules.

The seven functions are to be studied in order to know about the actual regimes. This best regime is the one that is best in producing unity because the integration of society is the main function of a political system.

**1.1.5 Exercise Questions**

1. Write in detail about the nature and emergence of political sociology?

**1.1.6 Short Questions**

1. Political Sociology
2. Emergence of Political Sociology

**1.1.7 Reading List**

- Ashraf, Ali and Sharma, L.N. *Political Sociology: A New Grammar of Politics*. Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
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- Dowse, Robert Edward and Hughes. J.A. 1986. *Political Sociology*. The University of Michigan.
- Haralambos, M and Heald, R.M. 1997. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi
- Janoski, Thomas; Alford, Robert. R; Hicks, Alexander M and Schwartz, Mildred A. 2005. *The Handbook of Political Sociology*. Cambridge University Press. New York.
- Roy, Shefali. 2014. *Society and Politics in India: Understanding Political Sociology*. PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd. Delhi

**MAX WEBER**  
**SOCIAL ACTION, MEANING AND IDEAL TYPES**

**1.2.1 The Object of Sociology**

Weber defines sociology in his posthumously published magnum opus, *Economy and society*, as follows: 'Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a science concerning itself with the [i] *interpretive understanding* of [ii] *social action* and thereby with a [iii] *causal explanation* of its [iv] *course and consequences*' (1978: 4). This apparently simple definition in fact yields the basic conceptual set or ensemble of Weber's sociology, which can be rendered more complete by adding [v] '*ideal types*' to it. In the sense Weber gives it, the goal of the science of sociology is to understand as well as explain social action as it proceeds and unfolds its intended and unintended consequences. The point of departure of Weber's sociology is social action in the same way as the point of departure in Marx's *Das capital* is commodity. What is social action?

**1.2.2 Social Action**

'We shall speak of "action",' writes Weber, 'insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior - be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course' (1978: 4). Helmut Wagner explains:

Action is human conduct which may consist of [i] physically tangible activities, [ii] of the activities of the mind, [iii] of deliberately refraining from acting, or [iv] of intentionally tolerating actions of others. In each case, however, human conduct is considered action only when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a meaning it and gives it a direction, which, in turn, can be understood as meaningful. Such intended and intentional conduct becomes social if it is directed upon the conduct of others. This in nutshell is Weber's conception of subjective meaning as a crucial criterion of human action (1970: 8).

Action, in all its diverse variety as elucidated by Wagner, is behaviour to which the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning. Accordingly, reflexive, insane, or much of mystical behaviour does not qualify as action simply because it is devoid of meaning. Action becomes social if it is oriented to or directed upon the conduct of others. However, action oriented solely to inanimate objects is not social, nor is a mere collision of two cyclists a social act. Again, '*similar actions* of many persons', '*every action influenced* by other persons' and '*mere imitation* of the actions of others' are not to be considered social if those engaged in such actions do not take account of the behaviour of others. For, social action 'is confined to cases where the actor's behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of others' -- 'past, present, or expected future behavior of others' (Weber 1978: 22-23).

For Weber, sociology is centrally concerned with the subjective meaning of social conduct, but he 'uses the term subjective meaning in more than one way' (Wagner 1970: 8). It designates 'the meaning the actor himself ascribes to his conduct as well as the meaning sociology imputes to the conduct of the observed actor. In the latter case...the sociologist tries to find out what would be the typical average of the meaning numerous persons ascribe to the same type of action; or he constructs the extreme, or ideal, type of such conduct, showing its characteristics under pure conditions' (Wagner *ibid.*: 8). In Weber's own word

"Meaning" may be of two kinds. The term may refer first to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly to the theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action. In no case does it refer to an objectively "correct" meaning or one which is "true" in some metaphysical sense (Weber 1978: 4).

As we clarified in our discussion of methodological individualism, individuals act, not collectivities or organisations. Therefore, interpretive sociology concentrates on the social actions of one or more individual human beings. As R. Aron crisply put in his *German sociology*, 'Interpretive sociology is individualistic, by virtue of a methodological postulate. Neither the body cells nor the State can be understood, since one can only understand conscious procedures and there is no consciousness other than that of individuals' (1964: 100). Aron further notes that 'Sociology can use as "data" the results of studies of race, of the influence of the physical environment, of physiological reactions and of non-interpretive psychology, e.g. psycho-pathology. But these data are only the conditions or occasions of the human acts which are the real subject matter of sociology' (*ibid.*: 100). According to Weber:

Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behavior exists only as the behavior of one or more individual human beings. For other cognitive purposes it may be useful or necessary to consider the individual, for instance, as a collection of cells, as a complex of bio-chemical reactions, or to conceive his psychic life as made up of a variety of different elements, however these may be defined. Undoubtedly such procedures yield valuable knowledge of causal relationships. But the behavior of these elements, as expressed in such uniformities, is not subjectively understandable. .. For still other cognitive purposes-- for instance, juristic ones -- or for, practical ends, it may on the other hand be convenient or even indispensable to treat social collectivities, such as states, associations, business corporations, foundations, as if they were individual persons. Thus they may be treated as the subjects of rights and duties or as the performers of legally significant actions. 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 (1978: 13)

### **1.2.3 Types of Social Action**

After having grasped the essential nature of social action as subjectively understandable behaviour of mutually-oriented human beings, we may now turn to the consideration of its types. Weber distinguishes four types of social action in terms of their orientation, namely, *zweckrational* or instrumentally rational, *wertrational* or value-rational, traditional, and affectual. Underlying the typology is the opposition of rational vs non-rational. The first two types of action are rational in the choice of means to their respective ends, while the latter two are driven by tradition or emotion. The four types of action are pure or ideal types in the sense that they are hardly to be met in reality in their pure form. As we will see, the construction of ideal types is the key methodological device deployed by Weber to understand and explain social action.

#### **a. Zweckrational or instrumentally rational action**

The term *zweckrational* action occurs in Max Weber's *Economy and society* as a substitute for 'associational action' that he had used earlier in his 1913 essay *Some categories of interpretive sociology*. The latter concept was dropped in *Economy and society* along with the allied concept of 'consensual action'.

It seems that there is no exact English equivalent of the German word *zweckrational*, so that it is translated variously as instrumental action, goal-

rational action, purposely rational action, or instrumentally rational action. Following Swedberg (2005: 126-27) we will take the last option, which has won wider currency than others.

According to Weber, instrumentally rational action (*zweckrational*) is 'determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as "conditions" or "means" for the attainment of the actor's own rationality pursued and calculated ends' (1978: 24).

Action is instrumentally rational (*zweckrational*) when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed. This involves rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends. Determination of action either in affectual or in traditional terms is thus incompatible with this type.

In other words, action is instrumentally rational when the actor, guided by his material interests, chooses both his means and ends rationally to reap maximum benefit at a minimum cost. As Frédéric Vandenberghe spells out: 'He [the actor] arranges competing ends in hierarchical order according to the "principle of marginal utility": he chooses his ends on the basis of material interests; calculates costs implied by the achievement of the established goals in a reflective manner; predicts the manifest and latent consequences of his action; and, constantly weighs costs against benefits' (2009: 100).

The instrumentally rational action embodies formal, instrumental and technical rationality towards which the process of rationalisation leads. The *zweckrational* action is not only wholly rationally intelligible in itself; it also serves as the yardstick to compare and understand the three other types of action, which can be viewed as compromises with or deviations from this ideal type.

#### **b. Wertrational or value-rational action**

Value-rational action, writes Weber, is 'determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success' writes Weber (1978: 25). According to Raymond Aron, instrumentally rational action is 'rational action in relation to goal' whereas value-rational action is 'rational action in relation to value' (1967: 186-87).

When an actor chooses and acts to pursue a value self-consciously and in a planned way regardless of the prospect of success, then the action is value-rational. The logic or rationality of the action derives from the actor's value-

commitments and not from his material interests or calculations. Frédéric Vandenberghe elaborates

The individual who acts in a value-rational manner (*wertrational*) is not concerned by the foreseeable consequences of his acts. He puts himself solely in the service of a value or a religious, political or other cause, in the belief that duty imposes itself unconditionally and personally on him. The paradigmatic instance of the value-rational act is the *praxis pietas* of the devotee or religious follower who is motivated by the fervor of his faith to respect theological precepts and put his life in the service of God (2009: 101).

The value-rationality is labelled *substantive rationality* by Max Weber. However, from the standpoint of *zweckrational* action, writes Weber, 'value-rationality is always irrational. Indeed, the more the value to which action is oriented is elevated to the status of an absolute value, the more "irrational" in this sense the corresponding action is. For, the more unconditionally the actor devotes himself to this value for its own sake, to pure sentiment or beauty, to absolute goodness or devotion to duty, the less is he influenced by considerations of the consequences of his action' (1978: 26).

### **c. Affectual action**

Translated also as affective action, 'affectual (especially emotional) action' is determined by the actor's specific affects and feeling states'. The definition is self-explanatory. When feelings and emotions such as love, hate, anger or jealousy provoke action, it is affectual action. It is non-rational or irrational action unguided by either goals or values. Aron gives some obvious examples to highlight its nature: 'The action Weber calls affective is action that is dictated immediately by the state of mind or humour of the subject: the slap the mother gives her child because it has been unbearably bad; the punch administered during a football game by a player who has, as we say, lost control of himself. In all these examples, the action is defined, not with reference to a goal or system of values, but by emotional reaction of an actor placed in a set of circumstances' (1967: 187).

Weber compares affectual action with value-rational action as follows: The orientation of value-rational action is distinguished from the affectual type by its clearly self-conscious formulation, of the ultimate values governing the action and the consistently planned orientation of its detailed course to these values. *At the same time the two types have a .common element, namely that the meaning of the action does not lie in the achievement of a result ulterior to it, but in carrying out the specific type of action for its own sake.* Action is affectual if it satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification,

devotion, contemplative bliss, or for working off emotional tensions (irrespective of the level of sublimation (1978: 25; emphasis added).

Affectual action also shares a feature with traditional action, affirms Weber : Both are on the borderline of meaningfully oriented action.

#### **d. Traditional action**

'Traditional action' is 'determined by ingrained habituation,' writes Weber. Aron explains that, 'the traditional action is action that is dictated by customs, by beliefs become habitual and second nature, as it were, so that to act according to tradition the actor need not imagine a goal, or be conscious of a value, or be stirred by an immediate emotion; he simply obeys reflexes that have become entrenched by conditioning (1967: 187). In short, traditional action is customary behaviour involving an 'automatic reaction to habitual stimuli'. If the actor's attachment to habitual forms becomes self-conscious, then 'the type may shade over into value-rationality'. According to Weber, the 'the great bulk of all everyday action to which people have become habitually accustomed approaches this type' (1978: 25).

After having listed and clarified the nature of the four types of action-orientations, Weber makes two important concluding points: One, concrete cases of action are usually not of one type, but combine more than one orientation and, two, the four types of action do not exhaust all the possibilities of the field.

It would be very unusual to find concrete cases of action, especially of social action, which were oriented only in one or another of these ways. Furthermore. this classification of the modes of orientation of action is in no sense meant to exhaust the possibilities of the field, but only to formulate in conceptually pure form certain sociologically important types to which actual action is more or less closely approximated or, in much the more common case, which constitute its elements (1978: 26).

#### **1.2.4 Some other types of social action**

The typology consisting of the four pure types of action as discussed above is, of course, fundamental to Weber's sociology and runs through the entire gamut of his ideal-typical constructs of social reality at different levels of complexity, from individual behaviour to structural social forms. But then Weber mentions other typologies of social action, too, that need to be briefly indicated. For Weber, 'Empirical uniformities of social action come in the form of *usage*,

*custom* and *self-interest*,' writes Swedberg (2005: 247). And here is Weber's explanation of these three types:

Within the realm of social action certain empirical uniformities can be observed, that is, courses of action that are repeated by the actor or (simultaneously) occur among numerous actors since the subjective meaning is meant to be the same. Sociological investigation is concerned with these typical modes of action...

If an orientation toward social action occurs regularly, it will be called "usage" (*Brauch*) insofar as the probability of its existence within a group is based on nothing but actual practice. A usage will be called a "custom" (*Sitte*) if the practice is based upon long standing. On the other hand, a uniformity of orientation may be said to be "determined by self-interest," if and insofar as the actors' conduct is instrumentally (*zweckrational*) oriented toward identical expectations (1978: 29).

It is easy to see that this typology of usage, custom and self-interest is in line with Weber's distinction between traditional action and instrumentally rational action, the only difference being that here Weber is talking about the *regular social conduct* of one or more human beings. Weber also distinguishes custom from *convention* and *law*: While convention and law are backed by external sanction, custom is not followed by people under any external pressure or coercion, but of their free will.

The last social action concept we would like to mention is that of *social relationship*.

The term "social relationship" will be used to denote: the behavior of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a probability that there will be a meaningful course of social action -- irrespective, for the time being, of the basis for this probability (Weber 1978: 26-27).

Weber then distinguishes between a variety of social relationships: among others, communal and associative, open and closed, and symmetrical and asymmetrical social relationships. Communal relationship is based on the subjective feeling of solidarity, while associative relation arises out of a rational adjustment of interests. Open relationship, whether communal or associative, does not deny participation to anyone as against closed relationship which restricts such participation. In an objectively symmetrical relationship, 'the meaning for one party is the same as that for the other party'. When parties

associate different meanings with the social relationship, it becomes objectively asymmetrical.

A social relationship will be called "communal" if and so far as the orientation of social action --whether in the individual case, on the average, or in the pure type -- is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together.

A social relationship will be called "associative" if and insofar as the orientation of social action within it rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgment be absolute values or reasons of expediency (Weber 1978: 40-41).

A social relationship, regardless of whether it is communal or associative in character, will be spoken of as "open" to outsiders if and insofar as its system of order does not deny participation, to anyone who wishes to join and is actually in a position to do so. A relationship will, on the other hand, be called "closed" against outsiders. so far as, according to its subjective meaning and its binding rules, participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions (ibid.: 43).

A relationship is objectively symmetrical only as, according to the typical expectations of the parties, the meaning for one party is the same as that for the other... [When] the parties associate different meanings with their actions ...the social relationship is objectively "asymmetrical" from the points of view of the two parties (ibid.: 27).

Having explained the nature and types of social relationship, Weber introduces the concept of order and derives the particular types of corporate groups and compulsory associations in order to deal with the complex phenomena of economy, government, law, and religion. But we need to stop at this point to move to a consideration of Weber's methodology of *verstehen* and ideal types to understand and explain social action.

### **1.2.5 Verstehen**

To understand the subjective meaning of human social conduct is called *verstehen*. Thomas Burger contrasts *verstehen* as subjectively meaningful *understanding* with *begreifen*, the *grasping* of meaningless facts:

The knowledge which scientists are striving for in history thus involves knowledge of human actors' "inner states." For it is these "inner states" of actors, i.e., their motives, plans, affects, emotions, etc., which cause their actions and thereby give these actions their

subjective meanings. Knowledge of such "inner states" and therewith the meanings of actions and objects in conjunction with which such inner states occur has usually been called "understanding" (*Verstehen*). In contrast to understanding stands the "grasping" (*Begreifen*) of meaningless facts, i.e., those which are not, or cannot, be treated as having some human actor's inner states concerned with their creation or maintained existence (1976: 103).

Compared to the clear distinction between *verstehen* and *begreifen*, however, the one between understanding and interpretation (*deutung*) is less determinate as Weber is not always consistent in his use of the latter two terms. According to Burger:

Giving a meaningful content the form of a judgment Weber calls 'interpretation' (*Deutung*), or also 'interpretive understanding' (*deutendes Verstehen*). An interpretation is the imposition (*Zurnutung*) of a judgment in the sense of the acknowledgement of an empirical interrelationship as a validly 'understood one'. Unfortunately, Weber often uses the terms 'interpret' and 'understand' synonymously, with the inevitable result of terminological and theoretical confusion on the part of the reader. Thus, he equates 'empathy' and 're-experiencing' with 'interpretive understanding,' calls 'interpretation' an 'absolutely secondary category which has its home in the artificial world of science,' calls 'understanding' an 'interpretive grasp' (*deutende Erfassung*), but also says that there is understanding whose purpose is not to produce a 'theoretical interpretation' (1976: 65).

Notwithstanding the terminological and theoretical confusion pointed out by Burger, Weber's view of *verstehen* can legitimately be articulated with reference to three conceptual pairs, namely, *empathic understanding and rational understanding*; *direct observational understanding and interpretive or explanatory understanding*; and *meaning adequacy and causal adequacy*. A brief explication of these concepts will clarify what *verstehen* or understanding is, how it is acquired and when it can be said to be adequate. The goal of the sociologist is to gain adequate and interpretive understanding of social action by empathic and/or rational means. Weber's central concern remains rational understanding, though.

#### **a. Empathic understanding and rational understanding**

Weber defines the two types as follows:

All interpretation of meaning, like all scientific observations, strives for clarity and verifiable accuracy of insight and comprehension

(*Evidenz*). The basis for certainty in understanding can be either rational, which can be further subdivided into logical and mathematical, or it can be of an emotionally empathic or artistically appreciative quality. Action is rationally evident chiefly when we attain a completely clear intellectual grasp of the action-elements in their intended context of meaning. Empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place (1978: 5).

The goal of 'all interpretation of meaning', says Weber, is '*clarity and verifiable accuracy* of insight and comprehension', the basis for which can be either rational or empathic. An action is rationally evident, when it is grasped intellectually in relation to the actor's motive or, which is the same thing, the intended context of meaning; on the other hand, empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when the emotional context of an action is grasped through sympathetic participation.

We have perfectly clear understanding when someone uses the proposition  $2 \times 2 = 4$  or reasons logically according to accepted modes of thinking or pursues *zweckrational* action. 'The interpretation of such rationally purposeful action possesses, for the understanding of the choice of means, the highest degree of verifiable certainty,' writes Weber (1978: 5). The meaning of a mathematical proposition, a logical train of reasoning or a rationally purposeful action is equally and perfectly susceptible to rational understanding and interpretation. Weber points out that it is possible, albeit with a lower degree of certainty, 'to understand errors, including confusion of problems of the sort that we ourselves are liable to, or the origin of which we can detect by sympathetic self-analysis' (1978: 5).

According to Weber, understanding of actions oriented to values or ends inaccessible to us is much more difficult, even if we can sometimes grasp such *wertrational* actions intellectually. Acts of religious or charitable zeal, for instance, may fall in this category. However, Weber points out: 'The more we ourselves are susceptible to such emotional reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion, and appetites of all sorts, and to the "irrational" conduct which grows out of them, the more readily can we empathize with them' (1978: 6). Even when the observer cannot experience emotions in the same way as the actor, he or she 'can still have a significant degree of emotional understanding of their meaning and can interpret intellectually their influence on the course of action and the selection of means' (ibid.: 6).

Weber suggests that for purposes of a typological scientific analysis, the pure type of rational action can be used as a yardstick or point of reference to understand the irrational or emotional elements of human behaviour:

For the purposes of a typological scientific analysis it is convenient to treat all irrational, affectually determined elements of behavior as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action... The construction of a purely rational course of action in such cases serves the sociologist as a type (ideal type) which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity. By comparison with this it is possible to understand the ways in which actual action is influenced by irrational factors of all sorts, such as affects and errors, in that they account for the deviation from the line of conduct which would be expected on the hypothesis that the action were purely rational.

Only in this respect and for these reasons of methodological convenience is the method of sociology "rationalistic." It is naturally not legitimate to interpret this procedure as involving a rationalistic bias of sociology, but only as a methodological device. It certainly does not involve a belief in the actual predominance of rational elements in human life, for on the question of how far this predominance does or does not exist, nothing whatever has been said ( 1978: 6-7).

It is 'a methodological device' to try and understand an actual action by comparing it with the pure or ideal type of rational action and discern how it deviates from the latter under the influence of emotions and errors. The device does not imply that the method of sociology is rationalistic or that rational elements predominate human life. 'It is important to avoid this error ...which confuses the unavoidable tendency of sociological concepts to assume a rationalistic character with a belief in the predominance of rational motives, or even a positive valuation of rationalism' (Weber 1978: 18).

**b. *Direct observational understanding and explanatory understanding***

Within the rational type of understanding, Weber distinguishes between direct observational understanding (*aktuelles verstehen*) and interpretive or explanatory understanding (*erklarebdes verstehen*), which are sometimes translated respectively as 'immediate understanding' and 'motivational understanding'. Weber explains their nature thus

Understanding may be of two kinds: the first is the direct observational understanding of the subjective meaning of a given act as such, including verbal utterances. We thus understand by direct observation, in this case, the meaning of the proposition  $2 \times 2 = 4$  when we hear or read it. This is a case of the direct rational understanding of ideas. We also understand an outbreak of anger as manifested by facial expression, exclamations or irrational movements. This is direct observational understanding of irrational emotional reactions. We can understand in a similar observational way the action of a woodcutter or of somebody ' who reaches for the knob to shut a door or who aims a gun at an animal. This is rational observational understanding of actions (1978: 8).

Direct observational understanding is what makes social life possible in everyday world. Notice also that Weber calls it rational observational understanding, whether the action involved is affectual or rational. This is, however, the first level of understanding and the sociologist needs to progress to the second type of understanding: interpretive, explanatory or motivational understanding.

Understanding may, however, be of another sort, namely explanatory understanding. Thus we understand in terms of motive the meaning an actor attaches to the proposition twice two equals four, when he states it or writes it down, in that we understand what makes him do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances...This is rational understanding of motivation, which consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning... Similarly we understand the motive of a person aiming a gun if we know that he has been commanded to shoot as a member of a firing squad, that he is fighting against an enemy, or that he is doing it for revenge. The last is affectually determined and thus in a certain sense irrational. Finally we have a motivational understanding of the outburst of anger if we know that it has been provoked by jealousy, injured pride, or an insult. The last examples are all affectually determined and hence derived from irrational motives. In all the above cases the particular act has been placed in an understandable sequence of motivation, the understanding of which can be treated as an explanation of the actual course of behavior. Thus for a science which is concerned with the subjective meaning of action, explanation requires a grasp of the complex of meaning in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs. In all such cases, even where the processes are largely affectual, the subjective meaning of the action, including that also of the relevant meaning complexes, will be called the intended meaning (Weber 1978: 8-9).

Understanding that grasps the subjective meaning of an action in terms of motive is explanatory understanding. It is explanatory understanding that is

sought by sociology – 'the science concerned with the subjective meaning of action'. It requires that the particular act be placed in 'an understandable sequence of motivation' or 'the complex of meaning' in which it belongs. Motive, motivational sequence, intended meaning, and complex of meaning have broadly the same connotation for Weber. We understand immediately when we observe a person chopping wood. But it is not yet known why or with what motive he is chopping wood. Is he chopping for a wage, for recreation or to work off a fit of rage? Once the broad complex or context of meaning – the motive or intention behind the action – is rationally understood, the sociologist can be said to have achieved explanatory understanding. The rational understanding of motivation can be achieved whether the action is rational, affectual, or irrational.

Weber mentions several difficulties in the way of motivational understanding, but we will skip that discussion and pass on to the third pair of meaning adequacy and causal adequacy. When can understanding be said to be adequate?

**c. *Meaning adequacy and causal adequacy***

Explanatory or interpretive understanding has to be doubly adequate: Subjectively adequate or adequate on the level of meaning and causally adequate. Weber elucidates the terms:

A motive is a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question. The interpretation of a coherent course of conduct is "subjectively adequate" (or "adequate on the level of meaning"), insofar as, according to our habitual modes' of thought and feeling, its component parts taken in their mutual relation are recognized to constitute a "typical" complex of meaning...

The interpretation of a sequence of events will on the other hand be called causally adequate insofar as, according to established generalizations from experience, there is a probability that it will always actually occur in the same way. An example of adequacy on the level of meaning in this sense is what is, according to our current norms of calculation or thinking, the correct solution of an arithmetical problem. On the other hand, a causally adequate interpretation of the same phenomenon would concern the statistical probability that, according to verified generalizations from experience, there would be a correct or an erroneous solution of the same problem (1978: 11).

**To simplify:** to be able to grasp the complex of subjective meaning or the motive behind an action is to arrive at its subjectively adequate interpretation.

The component parts of the action thus interpreted are recognised to constitute, in their mutual relation, a *typical* complex of meaning: rational, affectual or traditional. And it is our 'habitual modes of thought and feeling', says Weber, that aid us in recognising the typical complexes of meaning. On the other hand, interpretation of a course of action or events is causally adequate if there is a probability that it will always occur in the same way. The statistical probability is based on 'established generalisations from experience'. Causal adequacy can also be established through what Weber calls 'imaginary experiment': Alternative causal sequences are imagined, according to the principles of 'objective possibility' and 'adequate causation', eliminating now one factor then another to see which sequence works best to explain the event. It is a counterfactual operation in the ideal-typical mode.

Both types of adequacy are complementary and necessary for a causal explanation of social action: 'If adequacy in respect to meaning is lacking, then no matter how high the degree of uniformity and how precisely its probability can be numerically determined, it is still an incomprehensible statistical probability, whether we deal with overt or subjective processes. On the other hand, even the most perfect adequacy on the level of meaning has causal significance from a sociological point of view only insofar as there is some kind of proof for the existence of probability that action in fact normally takes the course which has been held to be meaningful' (Weber 1978: 12).

### **1.2.6 Ideal Types**

#### **a. Some preliminary points**

A few preliminary points need to be noted about the ideal types – *a special variety of general concepts* – which constitute Weber's chief methodological tool harnessed to the explanatory understanding of social action.

First of all, it is well known that Weber borrowed the term 'ideal type' from Georg Jellinek (1851-1911), the German political and legal philosopher, but 'invested it with his own distinct meaning' (Swedberg 2007:120). Jellinek had used the term in a normative sense, but it has no moral or ethical connotation in Weber.

In fact, secondly, the whole idea of ideal-typical constructs did not originate with Weber; he only adopted it from his predecessors (Zeitlin 1976: 119). Ideal types were in use before him, albeit without the tag, in abstract economic theory as well as Marxian theory. About the latter, for instance, Weber writes:

We have intentionally avoided a demonstration with respect to that ideal-typical construct which is the most important one from our point of view; namely, the Marxian theory... Marxian "laws" and developmental constructs -- insofar as they are theoretically sound - are ideal types. The eminent, indeed unique, *heuristic* significance of these ideal types when they are used for the *assessment* of reality

is known to everyone who has ever employed Marxian concepts and hypotheses. Similarly, their perniciousness, as soon as they are thought of as empirically valid or as real (*i.e.*, truly metaphysical) "effective forces," "tendencies," etc., is likewise known to those who have used them (1949: 103).

Thirdly, Weber discussed ideal types not only in his early methodological essays, e.g., *Objectivity in social science and social policy* (1904), but also in his final theoretical work *Economy and society* written between 1918 and 1920. Some interpreters have noticed an inconsistency or at any rate a significant change in Weber's approach to ideal types between his early and late writings. It is said, for instance, that between 1904 and 1920 'individual ideal types' make way for 'generic ideal types' as does the term 'ideal type' for 'pure type' or just 'type' with a concomitant 'thinning down and instrumentalization of the concept of ideal type' (Brunn *et al* 2012: xxv ). The ideal type is little more than a methodological tool in Weber's late writings.

Perhaps because of such inconsistencies in Weber's theory of ideal types or between his theory and actual practice, considerable confusion has prevailed in the understanding and interpretation of the concept of ideal types. In his *Weber's theory of concept formation*, Thomas Burger (1976) mentions R. Aron, Talcott Parsons, Julien Freund, Von Schelting, Walter Eucken and Weippert among those who, in his view, did not fully grasp the logic or rationale behind the use of ideal-typical concepts or in some manner misconstrued the relationship between ideal types and empirical reality.

Contra the above interpreters, Burger believes that Weber's concept of ideal types is coherent and consistent and is based on his understanding of the relationship between theory and history or general concepts and the particularity of cultural phenomena. The following discussion will try and explain i. the *logic and nature* of ideal type concepts and their ii. *uses* and iii. *kinds*. Given the limitations of space, the discussion will necessarily remain brief and skeletal.

### **b. Logic and nature of ideal types**

It was a neo-Kantian belief, accepted by Weber, that no science is possible without abstract and rational concepts. Normally, concepts are formed by abstracting common features of a group of empirical phenomena and giving them a name. A 'tree' or a 'dog' is a concept in this sense – a common name for a class of similar phenomena. Sociology as the science of the concrete and historical reality of culture also needs concepts. But because of the *particularity and historicity of cultural phenomena*, general or class concepts of the kind available to natural sciences cannot be formulated in the cultural

sciences. According to Burger, it was exactly this dilemma that led Weber to the ideal-typical constructs. 'It is a naturalistic prejudice,' declares Weber, 'that every concept in the cultural sciences should be similar to those in the exact natural sciences'. 'This is an error, however, argues Weber. It is committed as a result of a wrong conception of the relationship between "law and reality" or "the concept and the conceptualized" in the scientific analysis of historical processes' (Burger 1976:117).

Since it is important to clearly understand why Weber opted for ideal types instead of individual concepts or general concepts of the kind prevalent in natural sciences, we need to quote Burger in full.

Ideal types are not Individual concepts (which have been described as accounts of unique historical developments), for they refer to a plurality of similar phenomena. It is, however, only a logical consequence of Weber's premises that ideal types are not genuinely general concepts, either. For according to Weber, general concepts are formed by stating a combination of component parts common to many phenomena. However...historians by definition are generally not interested in the common constellations of elements, but in the characteristic (typical) ones of a number of particular historical phenomena. These typical elements are shared by many phenomena, but not *to the same degree*. Some exhibit them in a more pronounced way than others. Therefore, a true general statement which predicates all these features of all the phenomena in question cannot be formulated. In terms of the class logic which Weber uses this is possible only when the predicated properties do not occur in degrees but are either equally present or equally absent (1976: 122).

The reason that for Weber certain concepts are neither general nor individual is now clear. So they must be accorded a special status. Given his starting point, however, it is not possible for Weber to conceive of other methodological forms than either general or individual ones. Therefore, since he has no appropriate conceptual forms available for what he wants to say, Weber has to change the reality to which the concepts refer. Thus, ideal types are general concepts which do not describe the elements which the instances of a class of phenomena have in common in the empirical world, but the elements which they have in common in an imaginary world, a utopia. This utopian world is so constructed that what are "characteristic" and "significant" elements, existing in gradations in the empirical world, become common elements in the imaginary one (ibid.: 123).

Burger makes at least three important points here. i. Ideal type concepts do not describe unique historical events or elements common to a class of

empirical phenomena and, therefore, they are neither individual concepts nor *genuinely* general concepts. ii. Instead, ideal types are general concepts of a special kind in that they describe the elements which the instances of a class of phenomena have in common not in the empirical world, but *in an imaginary or ideal world*, a utopia. Often Weber refers to ideal or pure types as 'thought-images', 'thought-pictures' or 'conceptual pictures' for being imaginary or fictive constructions. iii. The elements that go into the construction of the utopian or imaginary world are *characteristic* and *significant*, in short *typical*, elements of a cultural phenomenon.

Max Weber himself explains why concepts are needed in history and sociology and why particularly ideal-typical ones:

Every conscientious examination of the conceptual elements of historical exposition shows however that the historian as soon as he attempts to go beyond the bare establishment of concrete relationships and to determine the cultural significance of even the simplest individual event in order to "characterize" it, must use concepts which are precisely and unambiguously definable only in the form of ideal types (1949:92).

The distinction between simple class, or generic, concepts which merely summarize that which empirical phenomena have in common, and generic ideal types...of course varies with each concrete case. But no class, or generic, concept as such has a "typical" character, and a purely generic "average" type does not exist. . . . The more we are concerned with the simple classification of events which in empirical reality occur as mass phenomena, the more it is a matter of class concepts. However, the more we are concerned with the conceptualization of complicated historical interrelationships with respect to those of their components in which their specific cultural significance is contained, the more the concept -- or system of concepts -- will be ideal-typical in character (1949: 100-101)

From what Weber has said, it is now very clear why time and again he stresses that the purpose of ideal types is not to represent *empirical* reality or its essence or its central tendency. Ideal types are not class concepts or average types and should never be hypostatized 'as 'real "forces" or as a "true" reality, which operates behind the passage of events and which works itself out in history' (Burger 1976: 133). It follows that insofar as an ideal-typical concept does not make assertions about reality, it is not a hypothesis either: 'The ideal typical concept will help to develop our skill in imputation in *research*. It is no

"hypothesis" but it offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses. It is not a *description* of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of *expression* to such a description' (Weber 1949: 90).

The immediate questions before us now are: How are ideal types constructed? And what functions do they perform? The ideal types are constructed by selecting, according to a chosen value-viewpoint, characteristic features of a phenomenon under study (e.g., Protestant ethic, capitalism or bureaucracy) accentuating them, and synthesising them into a coherent whole – a unified analytical construct. The selected features are scientifically relevant, culturally significant/subjectively meaningful, and objectively possible. Weber explains:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct (*Gedankenbild*). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (*Gedankenbild*) cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a *utopia* (1949:90).

What is involved in the process of the ideal-type concept formation is abstraction, one-sided exaggeration or accentuation and synthesis of elements of reality. Weber points out that since socio-cultural reality is infinite and changing, it can never be reproduced or captured by concepts as a whole or for once and all. Hence it is possible and desirable to construct and reconstruct a number of ideal types from several viewpoints for its investigation. 'The light of the great cultural problems moves on. Then science too prepares to change its standpoint and its conceptual apparatus....It follows those stars which alone are able to give meaning and direction to its labor,' writes Weber (Burger 1976: 140).

Again, the constructed ideal type may fail in its intended purpose of producing cultural knowledge, in which case it has to be discarded or re-formed:

Whether it is a purely intellectual play or a scientifically fruitful formation of concepts can never be decided *a priori*. Here, too, there is only one criterion, namely that of success in the establishment of knowledge of cultural phenomena in their interrelationships, causal origin, and their significance. Accordingly, the formation of abstract ideal types must not be considered as the goal, but as a means (Weber in Burger 1976: 137).

**c. Uses of ideal types**

Now, if ideal or pure types are only imaginary or utopian constructs, what is their use? How do they produce cultural knowledge? According to Weber, ideal types are

i. 'indispensable for heuristic and expository purposes'; and they ii. 'develop our skill in imputation in research', iii. offer 'guidance to the construction of hypotheses' and iv. 'give unambiguous means of *expression*' for the description of reality (Weber 1949: 90).

Cultural sciences such as history and sociology require ideal-typical concepts, which, unlike general concepts, are able to retain historically interesting and culturally significant elements of the empirical social world. Weber's point is that there will be no cultural knowledge if there are no *clearly defined* concepts of pure type: 'If the historian (in the widest sense of the word) rejects an attempt to construct such ideal types as a "theoretical construction" i.e., as useless or dispensable for his concrete heuristic purposes, the inevitable consequence is...that he remains stuck in the realm of the vaguely felt' (Weber 1949: 94). Burger adds: 'A clearly defined concept representing the significant parts of a cultural phenomenon is possible only in ideal-typical form... ideal types adequately fulfill the function which they are supposed to fulfill, namely, allow the conceptually clear description of individual historical developments...' (1976: 136).

Burger has already clarified the expository or descriptive value of ideal types. However, their most important function is to 'facilitate empirically valid interpretation by providing an interpretative schema':

In all cases, however, the relationship between such rational teleological constructions and that reality which is the subject-matter of the empirical sciences, is of course not at all that of "law of nature" and "constellation" [of empirical facts], but merely that of an ideal-typical concept which serves to facilitate the empirically valid interpretation by providing a possible interpretation -- an interpretive schema -- with which the given facts are compared (Weber 2012: 84).

[Ideal type] has to be interpreted as a purely ideal limiting concept for the comparison with and scrutiny of reality for the purpose of emphasizing certain significant parts of empirical reality (Weber 1949: 93 ).

For illustration, we can take the example of the ideal type of *zweckrational* or purposely rational action. It is a yardstick -- *the interpretive schema* -- to understand and explain the conduct of

human actors in the empirical world. One can compare their actions with the ideal type and discover to what degree and in what ways do they diverge from it. By imaginary experiment, that is, by imputing *adequate causes* to *objectively possible* courses of action, one can understand what provokes deviation from the rational course of action and construct hypotheses for further exploration. Above all, the ideal type furnishes clearest terminology – 'the means of expression' – to describe aspects of concrete reality under study. Purposely rational, value-rational, affectual and traditional types help in disentangling and describing the varied elements of actual human conduct.

Ideal types are a heuristic device or, in other words, only a practical methodological tool to acquire knowledge and understanding – meaningful and causally adequate understanding – of human behaviour and culture embedded in history. Such is their logical purpose.

#### **d. Kinds of ideal type**

According to Burger, all ideal types have the same logical status and purpose and their construction follows the very same principles. Still some useful logical distinctions can be made within them. There are, firstly, the *individual ideal types*, 'abstract concepts of interrelationships', as Weber calls them. Burger writes: 'As far as the label is concerned, this type of ideal type is not called "individual" because it refers to one individual phenomenon but because the occurrence of the constellation of elements described in it characterizes, from the point of view adopted by the historian, a class of phenomena occurring in a distinct, unique, i.e., individual, historical epoch' (1976: 131-32). A concept such as feudalism or capitalism is of this kind.

In contrast are *generic ideal types*. Both individual and generic ideal types have the same logical status and are general in that they 'state what happens in a multitude of instances' (Burger), but they differ in terms of complexity. Individual ideal types state individual complexes of interrelationships 'which are significant in their uniqueness, such as Christianity, capitalism, etc' (Weber 1949: 100). On the other hand, generic ideal types state the components of the individual ideal types: 'Every individual ideal type comprises generic conceptual elements which are ideal-typically constructed' (ibid.:100). According to Weber, all the 'fundamental concepts' of economics are generic ideal types.

In the third category fall ideal-typical constructs that 'describe the (alleged) "essence" of complicated systems of ideas such as "Communism" or "Christianity" (Burger 1976: 132). Writes Burger: 'Weber's point here is that those constructs which are usually presented as descriptions of the "essence" of

phenomena do not describe the essence at all, but are ideal types, i.e., exaggerations from a particular viewpoint'(ibid.: 132).

Finally, 'there are ideal types of developments...A development is a causal sequence; the statement describing a causal sequence is ideal-typical when it states what only approximately or partly happens in a number of cases, and, therefore, cannot be given the status of a causal law of nature' (Burger 1976: 133).

### **V. Conclusion**

We have presented Weber's life, career, intellectual context and theoretical orientation in Section 1 and his views on social action, *verstehen* and ideal types in Section 2. Weber's writings have been interpreted, evaluated and used in many different ways. In his commemorative address on the occasion of Weber's birth centenary, R. Bendix made the the following assessment of his work:

This centenary is a welcome occasion for an attempt to outline the general conception of Weber's work. Universal scholarly recognition of this work has made Max Weber a classic of modern sociology. He is, however, an extremely awkward authority, for his work excels neither in simplicity of ideas nor in clarity of exposition. It can so easily be spoken of at many different levels, and offers points of departure for the most varied interpretations. This is borne out by the fact that, in recent years, not only Weber's political ideas but also his concepts such as charisma, economic rationality, bureaucracy, etc., have been cited both in support of, and in opposition to, the tendencies of modern society towards democracy and towards dictatorship, as evidence for and against the progressive or the reactionary consequence of modern science and of so-called mass-society (1965: 9).

More recently, a rather harsh judgement of Weber's sociological project has come from J.P.S. Uberoi, a distinguished Indian sociologist. According to Uberoi, Weber's Cartesian sociology remains stuck in unresolved dualisms: of understanding and explanation, meaning adequacy and causal adequacy, and intended meanings and unintended consequences—all ultimately emanating, in his view, from Weber's vacillations between positivism and hermeneutics. Describing Weber's project as the worst of the three major sociological projects (the other two being those of Marx and Durkheim), Uberoi concludes his critique with the following words: 'My reading of Weber may be taken as being parallel to the exercise of reading or explaining Shakespeare's tragedy of Hamlet as the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind' (2011: 10).

Criticism:- Weber's tendency to explain social reality in terms of individual motivation blurred the line between sociology and psychology. Also, Raymond Aron says that, "It is doubtful that Max Weber refrained from all value judgement".

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**MARXIAN APPROACH TO POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY****STRUCTURE****1.3.0 Objectives****1.3.1 Introduction about Marxian Approach****1.3.2 Marxian Concept of State and Politics****1.3.3 Limitations of Marxist Approach****1.3.4 Summary****1.3.5 Key Concepts/Words****1.3.6 Exercise Questions****1.3.7 Short Questions****1.3.8 Reading List****1.3.0 Objectives**

By the end of this chapter, the student shall be able to:

- To understand the Marxian approach to political sociology.
- To explore Marxist concept of State and Politics.

**1.3.1 Introduction about Marxian Approach**

The Marxist approach is a generic approach that covers the view of several Marxist scholars. These scholars follow the Marxian distinction between a bourgeoisie capitalist state and a socialist or non-capitalist state, and seek to understand the class character, form/function and dynamics of the state. This is done to analyse how the class character manifests itself in order to transform an exploited state into an instrument of the exploitative classes.

Marxian approach has place of its own that may be regarded as basically different from both the traditional and the modern approaches in several important respects, though we may discover certain points of resemblance with both as well. The astonishing feature of this approach is that here 'state', being the central theme of political science, is conceived as an inevitable consequence of class contradictions. As such, the system of Marxian dialectics culminates in the justification of a stateless condition of social life that would come into being as the final stage of social development. Moreover, economics dominates the scene so much so that all other disciplines like history, sociology, psychology and ethics become its offshoots. Politics becomes integrally connected with the basic economic structure finding its manifestation in the forces and relations of production. Thus, it is stressed that in the real world, "economic and political forces and factors are constantly interacting and are extremely hard to disentangle one from the other."

The significance of the Marxian approach is traceable in the fact that its utilisation calls for a deeper scrutiny of the meaning and nature of politics. Instead of keeping the focus of study confined to the formal structure and sub-structure of a political system, it lays emphasis on going at the roots. Thus, it holds that the economic system determines the class structure and as there is

a change in the means of production, distribution and exchange, so there is corresponding change in the relations of the masters and the slaves, the feudal lords and the serfs, the capitalists and the workers – the dominant and the dominated classes. Struggle for power constituting the bedrock of politics should, therefore, be studied in the context of the conflict between two antagonistic classes. This state of contradictions can end only in the establishment of a socialist society. Obviously this approach not only lays stress on the fact of social contradictions, it also discovers their resolution. In this way, it assumes a deterministic character.

If so, the Marxian approach becomes like an ideology. It stands on a particular set of propositions that are not open to question and that call for a concerted action for the sake of their realisation and implementation so as to change the world and not merely interpret it. It not only exposes the inherent weaknesses and defects of the existing capitalist system, it also informs the exploited and the oppressed class of the workers, peasants and toilers to unite so as to break the chains of the slavery and win the whole world. Thus it treats state as an instrument of exploitation and oppression by one class over another and lays down that class character of the state cannot come to an end until the classless society is culminated in the stateless condition of life. As Marx in his *German Ideology* says: "...in a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but where each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another thing tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, to fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."

Since the subject of comparative politics throws special focus on the study of the Third World countries, the Marxian approach endeavours to study the politics of the undeveloped and developing areas in the context of imperialistic exploitation that has for centuries kept very large number of the Afro-Asian countries in a state of political subjugation and economic exploitation and is still making efforts for the retention of the same in the garb of neo-colonialism. In this way, not the state but the 'class' remains, the main actor even in the realm of international politics and the entire class of the workers of the world is informed to break the hold of the imperialistic powers. Thus, Lenin calls imperialism the 'final stage of capitalism' and Maurice Dobb says: "Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and a financial stangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of 'advanced' countries. And this 'booty' is shared between two or three powerful world marauders aroused to the teeth...Who also involve the whole world in their war over the sharing of their booty."

Viewed in this context, a study of the politics of a poor and backward countries of the world should be made in the context of extra-societal forces operating in the international environment. Instead of making superficial comparisons between the political processes and institutions of the rich and advanced countries of the world like the United States, Britain and France on the one hand and the newly independent countries of the Third World like Zaire, Zimbabwe and Kampuchea on the other, we should study the working of the political system of the poor and backward countries of the world in the light of 'inputs' coming from the environment and the 'outputs' being a result of the same. Thus, Frantz Fanon suggests that the Marxian analysis "should always be stretched everytime we have to do with the colonial power." The reason of the justification of liberation wars going on in the dependent or semi-independent parts of the world

and the support of the Marxists for the same should be traced here. It is evident from the statement of Khrushchev: “The communists fully support such just wars and march in the front rank with people’s waging liberation struggles.”

In this way, the Marxian approach claims itself to be scientific as well as progressive. It rejects the present as oppressive, exploitative and inequitarian and instead desires a new setup in which exploitation and oppression are replaced by the glorious virtues of co-operation and harmony. Politics is treated as a manifestation of class antagonisms and its end is conceived in the culmination of social development when the phase of class identification and resolution of conflicts would unleash glorious human values. Thus, this approach that has been empirical so far, assumes a normative character. In short, the whole approach looks like “a theory, which qua theory provides a broad-based vision of society in all stages of development; at its base lies the fundamental importance of production, and from there the economic sub-structure of society and the crucial role of the class.”

The Marxian approach may be appreciated for being empirical. The role of economic factors in the operation of politics cannot be lost sight of. If the working of a political system is to be studied and analysed with the help of any modern approach (as structural-functional, input-output, political communication and simulation, political socialisation and acculturation, political development and modernisation etc.), the role of economics in the creation of inputs cannot be ignored. The inputs are so powerful that they have their definite impact on the decisions of the ‘men in authority roles’. Similarly, we may not ignore the fact of international economic forces that have an impact of their own on the environment within which the politics of a country, particularly of a poor and backward country, operates. The multinational corporations or transnational agencies have their strength in the domain of economics and their working in the form of neo-imperialism has its definite impact upon the politics of a country as a result of which revolutions and counter revolutions occur in a country like Indonesia, Chile and Iran. However, the weakness of this approach may be seen in its conversion into an ideology. The perspectives of this approach are so rigid that the subscriber has to work within a specified parameter. Elasticity is replaced by rigidity that has a circumvential effect on the scientific study of politics. Thus, this approach is criticised for culminating in the ‘pseudo-scientism of degenerated Marxism’.

### **1.3.2 Marxian Concept of State and Politics**

The Marxist approach continues to regard the state as the central concept in politics and define it as an instrument of maintaining and defending class domination and exploitation. “State is an instrument in the hands of the ruling class (the class of rich who own the means of production) for exploiting the poor, (the have-not—the working class).” The state that is the bourgeoisie capitalist state always acts to keep up the interests of the ruling class, i.e., the economically powerful class. In the name of maintaining law and order, it really seeks to maintain such a class-relation as will not disturb the existing social order which really stands dominated by it. It controls all aspects of social life for maintaining the interests of economically powerful class.

Several Marxist scholars describe the Indian state as a bourgeoisie state while other Marxists accept it as a neo-capitalist state or even a non-capitalist state trying to secure peacefully the socialistic objectives. The CPI holds the latter view while the CPM and CPI (ML) hold the former view. The CPI holds that though the monopoly bourgeoisie class exercises a powerful influence

on the Indian state, the latter is not dominated by this class. Hence it is a non-capitalist state. The CPM holds that the Indian state is an organ of the rule of the bourgeoisie and the landlords; it is led by the big bourgeoisie and is following the capitalistic path of development. Since 1991, the Indian state has been behaving as a capitalist organ of state power. The CPI (ML) holds that the Indian state is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state which is not truly independent. It continues to have a neo-colonial existence in the world. It analyses Indian society, politics and economic on the basis of class structure and the nature of relations between the Dalits and the non-dalits.

In fact, Marxian approach to the Indian political system seeks to analyse the economic factors of Indian politics, the economic class structure, the social basis of various political parties and the relation of the Government of India with the socialist and non-socialist countries.

Marxian approach advocates the view that the politics of a state is depend upon the nature of production relations between the two economic classes, the haves and have-nots. It holds the view that “Social structures at any time in a society are based on the prevailing modes of production of basic material necessities of life and on the relations of production that correspond with the modes of production.” Marx categorically stated and his follower accept that “ legal relations as well as forms of state can be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of mind but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life.....the anatomy of civil (political) society is to be sought in economic power.” “In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will—the relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of the development of material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society—the real structure on which rises a legal and political super structure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness (structures). The mode of production of material life condition the social, political and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their beings, but on the contrary, it is their social being that determines their consciousness.”

Hence the application of the Marxist approach to the study of the Indian political system involves identification of the material productive forces, the economic class structure, the production relations, the nature and level of class struggle between the rich and the poor, the political structure in terms of their economic and social policies and the class basis of party organizations. A study of these variables can help us to assess the level of development toward the final goal--the Democratic Socialist society. The study of Indian Government and politics has to be undertaken through a study of the economic/production relations, nature of social classes and the class struggle between the owners of the means of production and the working class.

It advocates a study of Indian political system in terms of:

1. Class structure of Indian Society.
2. Class basis of various Political Parties.
3. The class basis of the ruling party in particular.
4. The nature of relations between Dalits and Non-Dalits.
5. The labour policies of the ruling party or the coalition group.
6. It still views political parties as rightist or leftist parties or as secular and non-secular parties.

The Marxian approach is a useful sociological approach for the study of the Indian political system. However, it must be used in a very careful manner. Any one-sided and crude application can be highly misleading. The role of other factors, other than the economic factors, too must be analysed for a systematic and realistic analysis of the Indian political system.

Several Indian scholars who follow the Marxian tradition like A.R.Desai, also hold that despite affirming itself as a socialist state or despite accepting socialism as one of its five cardinal features (Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic and Republic), the Indian state continues to be a capitalist state. The constitution of India, the policies, plans and programmes of the Government of India since 1950, and the operation of Indian economy particularly after the new economic reforms of post 1991 years, all reflect the capitalist nature of Indian state and politics. The role of money power and the rich has been a dominant reality of Indian politics. The scam politics and bribes of winning confidence votes are the hard and unfortunate realities of Indian politics. The agricultural sector continues to be dominated by the rich farmers and the landlords so much so that several Marxist scholars like Ajit Roy even go to the extent of concluding that the Indian state is essentially an organ of the dictatorship of the Indian monopoly bourgeoisie and the rural bourgeoisie led by the farmer.

### **1.3.3 Limitations of Marxist Approach**

However such an analysis of the Indian state and politics by the Marxist scholars appears to be guided by their own ideological commitments as well as perceptions. The liberalist and the relative autonomy theorists do not accept the analysis and conclusions presented by the Marxists. They hold that in India, the middle class has emerged as a dominant and forceful segment of society which is acting the role of a dynamic entrepreneur and is involved in interest aggregation of a large section of the Indian population. It is fully engaged in the process of economic development. Hence, we cannot accept the Marxist view that the Indian state is a bourgeoisie state dominated by the rich entrepreneurs and land owners. The relative Autonomy theorists while holding that the Indian state is a capitalist state, nevertheless qualify this by admitting that the Indian state enjoys a relative autonomy of the dominant ruling classes.

### **CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

3. Discuss in detail the Marxian Approach to Political Sociology?

### **1.3.4 Summary**

The Marxist approach is a generic approach that covers the view of several Marxist scholars. These scholars follow the Marxian distinction between a bourgeoisie capitalist state and a socialist or non-capitalist state, and seek to understand the class character, form/function and dynamics of the state. This is done to analyse how the class character manifests itself in order to transform an exploited state into an instrument of the exploitative classes.

The Marxist approach continues to regard the state as the central concept in politics and define it as an instrument of maintaining and defending class domination and exploitation. "State is an instrument in the hands of the ruling class (the class of rich who own the means of production) for

exploiting the poor, (the have-not—the working class).” The state that is the bourgeoisie capitalist state always acts to keep up the interests of the ruling class, i.e., the economically powerful class. In the name of maintaining law and order, it really seeks to maintain such a class-relation as will not disturb the existing social order which really stands dominated by it. It controls all aspects of social life for maintaining the interests of economically powerful class.

In fact, Marxian approach to the Indian political system seeks to analyse the economic factors of Indian politics, the economic class structure, the social basis of various political parties and the relation of the Government of India with the socialist and non-socialist countries.

Hence the application of the Marxist approach to the study of the Indian political system involves identification of the material productive forces, the economic class structure, the production relations, the nature and level of class struggle between the rich and the poor, the political structure in terms of their economic and social policies and the class basis of party organizations. A study of these variables can help us to assess the level of development toward the final goal—the Democratic Socialist society. The study of Indian Government and politics has to be undertaken through a study of the economic/production relations, nature of social classes and the class struggle between the owners of the means of production and the working class.

It advocates a study of Indian political system in terms of:

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The Marxian approach is a useful sociological approach for the study of the Indian political system. However, it must be used in a very careful manner. Any one-sided and crude application can be highly misleading. The role of other factors, other than the economic factors, too must be analysed for a systematic and realistic analysis of the Indian political system.

### **1.3.5 Key Concepts/Words**

**Marxian Approach to Political Sociology:** The Marxist approach is a generic approach that covers the view of several Marxist scholars. These scholars follow the Marxian distinction between a bourgeoisie capitalist state and a socialist or non-capitalist state, and seek to understand the class character, form/function and dynamics of the state. This is done to analyse how the class character manifests itself in order to transform an exploited state into an instrument of the exploitative classes. The Marxist approach continues to regard the state as the central concept in politics and define it as an instrument of maintaining and defending class domination and exploitation. “State is an instrument in the hands of the ruling class (the class of rich who own the means of production) for exploiting the poor, (the have-not—the working class).” The state that is the bourgeoisie capitalist state always acts to keep up the interests of the ruling class, i.e., the economically powerful class. In the name of maintaining law and order, it really seeks to maintain such a class-relation as will not disturb the existing social order which really stands

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The Marxian approach is a useful sociological approach for the study of the Indian political system. However, it must be used in a very careful manner. Any one-sided and crude application can be highly misleading. The role of other factors, other than the economic factors, too must be analysed for a systematic and realistic analysis of the Indian political system.

### **1.3.6 Exercise Questions**

1. Write a detailed note on Marxian Approach to Political Sociology.

### **1.3.7 Short Questions**

1. Marxian Approach to Political Sociology

### **1.3.8 Reading List**

- Ghai, U.R. and Lall, N. 1992. *Indian Political System*. New Academic Publishing Co. Jalandhar.
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**LESSON NO. 1.4**

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**Structural Functional Approach: Analysis of Talcott Parsons**

Structural functional approach is based largely on the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton. Structural functional approach conceptualizes society as a system of interconnected parts working together in harmony to maintain state of balance for the whole. It focuses on the interconnectedness of society by emphasizing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts. As for instance, the increasing number of women in the workforce has contributed to the formation of policies against sexual harassment and job discrimination. Structural functionalism provides a holistic picture of society in which the interrelationship of sub systems and practices occupies the central place.

Talcott Parsons was probably the most dominant sociological theorist of his time. Between the year 1950 and late 1970, Parsons's structural functional approach was clearly the central theme around which theoretical controversies were highlighted. He attempted to provide theoretical framework through his general theory of actions which sought to unite various disciplines of social science: Sociology, Psychology, Politics and Economics.

The notion of system is central in his general theory of action. His system theory had become increasingly famous in the year 1940s and 1950s.

**Social system**

According to Parsons every social system has the following characteristics:

1. Social System involves an interaction between two or more actors.
2. In a social system interaction takes place in a situation.
3. There exists in a social system collective good orientation or common values and consent on expectations in normative and cognitive or intellectual senses.

Hence, Parsons views social system as a system consists in a plurality of individual actors in situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the optimization of gratification and whose relation to their situations including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols [Parsons, 1951, pp.5-6]

**Social Actions**

Parsons refers to a system of action as a durable organization of interaction between what he called might be an 'actor' and a 'situation'. The actor might be an individual or a group. The situation might or might not contain other 'actors'. Parsons is of the opinion that social action is derived from the behaviors of human beings. For him, behavior becomes action when it is oriented

to attainment of ends or goals. Social actions occur in the situations. They are regulated by norms and values of society and involve an investment of energy or motivation. He says that orientation of action can be of two types, when action takes place taking into account needs, appearances and plans in given situations known as motivated orientation of action. The other form of orientation is based on consideration of standards of values, morality and of thinking, such type of orientation is value orientation.

Parsons has been primarily concerned with the problem how affairs of state are accomplished and how social order is possible in the society. He was of the view that people act in the society on the basis of their values. Their actions are oriented and confined by the values and norms of people around them. These norms and values are the basis of social order. Parsons places importance to mainly two ways through which social equilibrium is maintained. First is the socialization through which society's values are transmitted from one generation to next. Such type of function is performed by the family and educational institutions. Another way of maintaining social equilibrium is mechanism of social control which prevents the deviance and preserve order in the society. Parsons's structural functional framework is based on the assumption that shared norms and values within the system are keystone to systematic survival of the system and deviation from these norms and values can jeopardize the survival of that system. In his theoretical framework, he identifies four functional needs that every social system is generally seeks to maintain stability. He indicates the following functional needs of social system:

**1. Adaptation:**

Every system of action should be able to adapt its external environment and make the environment adapt to its own needs. Food and shelter must be provided to meet the physical needs of their members. This function is accomplished primarily by economic institutions.

**2. Goal Attainments**

Every system of action has to define its goals and to mobilize resources in order to achieve them. This function is institutionalized in the form of political systems. Government not only decides the goals and set the priorities between them but also allocate resources to achieve them.

**3. Integration:**

For the sake of stability and coherence every system of action has to regulate and coordinate its parts. This function is performed by the institutions of law and judiciary. The legal norms set and standardize relations between individuals and between institutions and adjust their conflicts.

**4. Latency or Pattern Maintenance:**

It refers to providing means for sustaining motivational energy to its members by the system. The institutions which perform this function include the family, the education system and religion. Religious beliefs provide the ultimate justification for the values of the social system. [M. Haralambos, Sociology: Themes and Perspectives, pp.634.]

Hence, Parsons maintains that all the parts of society can be analyzed with reference the function they perform. Parsons argues that these functional needs are existed at all the levels into society as a whole and in each system. In the traditional societies most of these functions have been accomplished in family and kinship structures and in local communities. In such type of societies, there have been little differentiation of functions. But cultural and integration role often has been associated with religious beliefs.

With the passage of time as the society developed there functions tend to evolve with different institutions with specialization of roles in modern complex society.

### **Pattern Variables**

For Parsons, pattern variables are the alternate principles through which systematic structure is attained. They represent the basic choices underlying social interaction. They are more voluntaristic aspects of Parsons's theory as they summarize and classify choices. He designed pattern variable theory to explain microscopic and macroscopic situation to know negotiation between social actor and the influence of cultural and social system on his behavior in different social situations and its outcomes. According to him there are five different types of pattern variables:

#### **1. Affectivity Vs. Affective Neutrality:**

The pattern is affective when an organized action system emphasizes gratification. The pattern is affective neutral when it imposes renouncement of some gratification in the favour of others interests.

#### **2. Ascription Vs. Achievement:**

Ascription refers to value in traditional society as it gives rise to persistence without the element of change while achievement is modern trait. For Parsons by the way of assumption and achievement we can identify the actor.

#### **3. Particularize Vs. Universalism:**

Particularize marks to standards determined by an actor's particular relations with partial object. Universalism takes to highly generalized value standards. It speaks about the members of a society.

#### **4. Diffusion Vs. Specificity:**

This refers to inclusiveness of relationship and range of obligation appropriate in relationship.

#### **5. Collective orientation Vs. Self orientation:**

This dichotomy depends on social norms and shared expectations which define as legitimate the pursuit of actor's private interests or obligate him to act in the interests of the group.

In nutshell on the basis of above explanation we can identify the actors on the basis of achievement of inscriptive criteria and degree and range of emotions appropriate in action situation.

### **Social change**

Parsons had borrowed the idea of society in equilibrium from Vilfredo Pareto to explain change in the system. He used the concept of "moving equilibrium" in order to provide an explanation for social change in the society. Parsons is of the opinion that in practice no social system is in perfect state of equilibrium although certain degree of equilibrium is essential for the survival of societies. He put forward four basic functional prerequisites of social system namely adaptation goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance. A change in one functional need will produce response in other. For instance, a change in adaptation will result in a disturbance in social system as a whole and in order to achieve the equilibrium some change will occur in other functional need. Hence social system never attain complete equilibrium and social system more in a state of "moving equilibrium". Uniqueness of Parsons's approach lies in the fact that he admitted the scope for change by staying within the framework of functionalism.

### **Talcott Parson's Contribution to Political Sociology**

Talcott Parsons through his structural functional approach offers a model of his own system with its problems and its ability to cop with and a set of basic variables that an actor have to confirm in situation. The real concern of Parsons has been to study the needs of the society as a whole and its stability that is dependent upon their satisfaction. For him in a system of actions, individuals are the actors who play their role in the context of the shared values of the system. Through his structural functionalism Parsons justifies the role of rituals and religion and family with emphasis on their integrative role. Subsequently, certain political scientists, since the 1950, had used structural functionalism to the study of the themes of comparative politics having their fundamental concern with the phenomenon of system maintenance and regulation. Almond borrowed the chief elements and aspects of his structural functionalism mainly from sociology and specifically from Talcott Parsons. Almond conceptualizes political system as a set of interactions to be found in all independent societies performing the functions of integration and adaptation by employment more or less legitimate physical compulsions. Almond and Powell's approach specify seven functions of a political system. These are:

1. Political Socialization and Recruitment.
2. Interest Articulation.
3. Interest Aggregation
4. Political Communication
5. Rule making
6. Rule Application
7. Rule Adjudication.

The first four are identified as inputs and last three as outputs. Political system as a system of conversion of inputs into outputs performs the functions of integration and adaptation. Structural functional perspective can be applied for vertical comparative studies involving an analysis and comparison of processes of politics at the state levels. It can be used for analyzing Indian political system in terms of its structures, functions, capabilities and political development. The study of the environment of Indian political system can be done with regard to socio-economic-cultural-religious factors like caste, class tribe, economic associations, religious and linguistic minorities and political associations.

In nutshell with the application of this approach the functioning of the Indian political system as a developing liberal democratic socialist system through a parliamentary form of government can be analyzed and compared with political systems of European and non European.

**Reading List:**

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Parsons, Talcott (1951): *The Social System*, Rutledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd. London.