



B.A. PART-III
(Semester-V)

SOCIOLOGY

UNIT - I

Department of Distance Education
Punjabi University, Patiala

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LESSON NO. :

AUGUSTE COMTE

- 1.1 : The Law of the three stages
- 1.2 : Positivism

HERBERT SPENCER

- 1.3 : Evolutionary Theory
- 1.4 : Organic Analogy
- 1.5 : Types of Society

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NOTE :

**Students can download the syllabus from
department's website www.dccpbi.com**

AUGUSTE COMTE : THE LAW OF THE THREE STAGES

Structure :

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1.0 OBJECTIVES :

A study of this lesson will enable you to :

- * know something about the life and works of Auguste Comte;
- * appreciate the historical context of his positive philosophy and sociology; and
- * learn about Comte's famous law of the three stages or three states through which humankind has passed, or will pass, in its intellectual and social evolution.

1.1 INTRODUCTION :

Auguste Comte (1792-1857) is generally regarded as the father of sociology. It was he who coined the term sociology by combining Latin *socius* with Greek *logos*. The grand theory that Comte worked out and published in six volumes from 1830 to 1842 is known as *positive philosophy*. His sociology was, in a

sense, the finale or culmination of his positive philosophy.

The present lesson [i] briefly introduces the life and works of Auguste Comte, [ii] situates his *oeuvre* in its historical context, and [iii] describes in some detail the central doctrine of his positive philosophy, namely, the law of the three stages or three states that governs, according to Comte, the historical progress of human mind and human society in all places and at all times.

1.2 AUGUSTE COMTE : AN INTRODUCTION :

His Life

Auguste Comte (*in full* Isidore-auguste-marie-francois-xavier Comte) was born at Montpellier in the south of France on 19 January 1798. His father Louis Comte, a tax official, and his mother Rosalie Boyer were, in the words of R. Fletcher, 'strongly royalist and deeply sincere Roman Catholics.' In line with the spirit of his times, however, Auguste Comte rejected both royalism (i.e. support for the French monarchy) and the Catholic faith at an early age.

Comte was intellectually precocious; he was a brilliant student in school and showed exceptional gifts in mathematics. At the age of sixteen, he joined the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique in Paris. Initially set up to train military engineers, Ecole Polytechnique was soon transformed into a general school for advanced sciences. According to Rene Konig, it was also the centre of political liberalism and progressive thought in France. The Polytechnique was temporarily closed down in 1816 following student unrest in which Comte too was involved.

In 1817, Comte became secretary to the great socialist thinker, Henry de Saint-Simon with whom he spent seven formative years before he 'branched out on his own', as Mike Gane puts it. His marriage in 1825 to Caroline Massin, a bookseller, was unsuccessful and eventually ended in separation. Comte became mentally ill in 1826 and attempted suicide twice, but was rescued. 'In 1845,' writes Kolakowski, 'he met Clotilde de Vaux, and their short-lived relationship (she died about a year later) greatly influenced his later works. His worship of her is reflected in his views on the important part women and 'universal affection' were assigned in the 'positive society' of the future.'

At no stage did Comte obtain a regular academic appointment he so earnestly desired; instead, he had to make do with a series of low-paid, marginal academic jobs. In this connection, Kolakowski writes:

He lived from hand to mouth and for a time supported himself meagrely by tutoring. In 1826, he launched a course of lectures intended to acquaint the public, particularly men of science, with the principles of what he called 'the positive philosophy'. Soon, however, a severe mental derangement forced him to stop. The lectures were resumed in 1829 after he recovered. In 1830 the

first volume of his *Course in Positive Philosophy* appeared. The sixth and last was published twelve years later. But neither the lectures nor the books brought in any money. He gave private lessons in mathematics, then was appointed examiner at the École Polytechnique; his attempts to obtain a permanent academic post were unsuccessful. For some time he received funds from England, which John Stuart Mill collected for him, but to the end of his days he was tormented by financial worries.

Kolakowski fails to mention that besides J.S.Mill, Comte's French disciples, especially the philologist and lexicographer Maximilien Littre, also supported him financially and that Comte lost his job as external examiner at the the Ecole Polytechnique because he had quarrelled with the directors of the school. In any case, domestic infelicity and financial worries led to an early end of Comte's life and he died of cancer on September 5 1857. Before he passed away, Comte had won a small circle of admirers and also founded the Positivist Society in 1848. Mike Gane sums up Comte's contributions in diverse fields as follows:

Auguste Comte was a remarkable figure...[i] He is of course well known as being the founder of sociology in the sense that he coined the word and gave it its first content, the so-called 'law of the three states.' [ii] He is also widely known for his important position in the history of philosophy as one of the key founders of positivist philosophy, even if his own position on positivism which differs from later logical positivism is not now widely understood at all in its own right. [iii] He was a major figure in the history of science, prefiguring the work of Bachelard and Serres, and Kuhn and Laudan. [iv] He played an important role in the formation of biology as a science. [iv] He was the founder of a cult, the Religion of Humanity. [v] He played an important role with Emile Littre, in the production of dictionaries...[vi] But it is also known that Comte contributed to ethics, and indeed coined the word 'altruism'. [vii] He is also known for having introduced into sociology, the sociology of gender and the emotions.

Works

The main works of Comte are generally acknowledged to be three: the *Opuscles* (1820-26), *Course in positive philosophy* (1830-1842) and *The positive polity* (1851-54). According to Raymond Aron, these works represent three stages in the philosophical evolution of Auguste Comte.

In the *Opuscles*, says Aron, Comte considered the society of his day and found that it was moving from one type (theological-military) to another (scientific-industrial).

Comte was the observer of the contradiction between two social types - a contradiction which can be resolved only by the triumph of that social type

which he calls scientific and industrial. This victory is inevitable, but it can be retarded or accelerated. The function of sociology, according to Comte, is to understand the necessary, indispensable, and inevitable course of history in such a way as to promote the realization of the new order.

In his second stage, that is, in the Course in positive philosophy, Comte further developed the themes which he had set forth in the Opuscles: the law of the three stages of evolution and the classification of the sciences:

In the second stage, that is, in the Course de Philosophie Positive, Comte gave more universal scope and deeper meaning to the idea of progress. In particular, he developed and corroborated the two basic themes which he had already expounded in the Opuscles: the law of the three stages of evolution and the classification of the sciences.

Finally, in the last stage of The positive polity, Comte tried to give a philosophical foundation to the idea of the unity of human history. Writes Aron:

[a] For human history to be one, man must have a certain recognizable and definable nature at all times and in all places. **[b]** Further, every society must admit of an essential order, whatever the diversity of social organizations. **[c]** Lastly, this human nature and this social nature must be such that the major characteristics of historical evolution may be deduced from them. Now in my view, the gist of the Systeme de Politique Positive can be explained by these three ideas.

In Aron's view, there is steady and smooth progression in Comte's thought from one stage to the next without any epistemological break or change in problematics. But this view has not been universally endorsed.

Besides the three works mentioned above, other notable writings of Comte include *Elementary treatise on analytic geometry* (1843), *Philosophical treatise on popular astronomy* (1844), *Discourse on positive spirit* (1844), *Positive catechism* (1854), and *Subjective synthesis or universal system of ideas concerning the normal state of humanity* (1856).

Intellectual influences on Comte :

In an article entitled 'The social and political philosophy of Comte', Harry Elmer Barnes has detailed the various intellectual influences on Auguste Comte and we can do no better than cite him in this context. Barnes points out that **[i]** Comte's 'chief contribution lay in his remarkable capacity for synthesis and organization rather than in the development of new and original social doctrines' and that **[ii]** he 'derived much from writers on social philosophy, from Aristotle to Saint-Simon.'

[a] From Aristotle he obtained his fundamental notion as to the basis of social organization, namely, the distribution of functions and the combination of

efforts. [b] From Hume, Kant and Gall he received his conceptions of positivism in method and his physical psychology. [c] From Hume, Kant and Turgot he obtained his views of historical determinism, and from Bousset, Vico and De Maistre his somewhat inconsistent doctrine of a providential order in history. [d] From Turgot, Condorcet, Bourdin, and Saint-Simon he derived his famous law of the three stages in the intellectual development of mankind.

[e] From Saint-Pierre, Montesquieu, Condorcet, and Saint-Simon he secured his conception of sociology as the basic and directive science, which must form the foundation of the art of politics... It was the significant achievement of Comte to work out an elaborate synthesis of these progressive contributions of the thought of the previous century and to indicate the bearing of this new social science upon the problems of European society in the nineteenth century [emphasis added].

Barnes has listed only the main sources of Comte's social doctrines and, therefore, his list remains incomplete. For example, Barnes makes no reference to the influence of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson or Hegel and Herder on Comte. More importantly, he neglects to point out the decisive role that the scientific revolution in France around 1800 played in the formation of Comte's thought. This role has recently been highlighted by Michel Serres: 'I believe that Comte is codifying an idea or a feeling which one can read or experience in the works and lives, in the social and speculative activities of the scientists who lived through the French Revolution, who were at Paris in the year 1800... Fourier, Laplace, Lavoisier, Haüy, Lamarck, Monge and twenty others knew and felt that they were entering into a new time in which rational science would become the crucial social factor, which would dominate education, the army, industry and agriculture, which in turn would produce the preconditions of reason.' In short, Comte's work was not isolated or idiosyncratic, but formed part of a very specific configuration in French intellectual history. This is the point Michel Serres is making, and perhaps we need to look a little more closely at Comte's overall project and its context.

Comte's project and its context :

Comte was born in the wake of the French Revolution (1789), which marked the final collapse of the social forms of medieval European Catholic Christendom. According to Comte, the outstanding structural feature of medieval Catholicism was, as Gane puts it, 'the separation and ascendancy of spiritual authority (the papacy) over relatively divided temporal powers (kings and princes)'. The fundamental cause of the decline of this medieval structure was the combined effect of the scientific and industrial civilisation.

The Revolution had pushed the French society into confusion and chaos. It was obviously not possible to restore the medieval order or to leave society in

a state of disarray. Society had to be reformed and reconstructed. But how? Social reconstruction could not be effected, argued Comte, without first understanding the nature of society and its laws of order and progress, statics and dynamics. To this end, a theoretical science of society was needed and it was Comte's life-long project to create such a science, the science of sociology. Let us cite some authorities to further elucidate the point:

[Comte] was startled by the destructive effects of the French Revolution, by the disorder created by the forcible destruction of social groups intermediate between the family and the state. Therefore the improvement of society early became Comte's main preoccupation, the very goal of his life. But he believed that to improve society one needed a theoretical science of society. Since this science was not available, he set about creating it. In his opinion this new science depended on other sciences; therefore he decided to study the whole series of sciences, which he identified with positive philosophy. . From the results of such study Comte sought to formulate a system of laws governing society so that he could postulate a cure for society on the basis of these laws (N.S. Timasheff).

Comte lived in the aftermath of the French Revolution. He was continually disturbed and distressed by the disorder of his time, and by the material and cultural poverty of the people. His fundamental and lifelong preoccupation was how to replace disorder by order; how to accomplish the total reconstruction of society. He saw the French Revolution as the crucial turning point in the history of human affairs. The ancien regime was gone, fallen to pieces, shown to be totally inadequate for the new trends and conditions of scientific knowledge and industrialization. There was no adequate order of institutions for the new changes in society. The social action was ungoverned and ill-directed. The thought of men was disoriented... A new polity - a new order of feeling, thought and action - was necessary for the new complex industrial society. But this social reconstruction needed a reliable basis of knowledge (R. Fletcher).

Commitment to social reform through science - the science of society - defined Comte's total project, his positive philosophy as well as positive polity. 'He created positivism and its keystone, sociology, to construct a new cohesive society that would encompass the conservatives' call for order and the leftists' preference for progress,' writes Mary Pickering (2001).

Once sociology and its practitioners have begun to rule society, a new political, moral and religious order would emerge consistent with the spirit of science and industry and ensuring both social stability and social growth. Comte believed that 'positive polity' of his dreams would need science as well as a new religion of humanity and a new ethics of altruism and love to sustain itself.

Thus, Comte's positive philosophy is predicated on a double commitment to science *and* morality, facts *and* values, *and* theory and practice; it should not be confused with naïve scientism, empiricism, or logical positivism of the later period. At the same time, the relationship posited between science, morality and politics in Comte is certainly not the same as in, say, Marxism or structural semiology. In Marxism, for instance, science is internally connected with the *revolutionary praxis* of the proletariat, but in Comtean positivism sociological science forms only an extrinsic basis of social *engineering* by experts and technocrats.

The key doctrine of Comte's positive philosophy and positive sociology is the Law of the Three Stages or Three States that governs the progression of human knowledge and human society from the theological, through the metaphysical, to the positive state. Mike Gane puts the issue in perspective:

It is important to bear in mind that Comte did not coin the word 'sociology' until 1839. Before that he referred to his social science as a 'social physics' located within the field of 'social physiology'. Nevertheless he claimed to have discovered the basic law of this domain in 1822, a law to be baptised as the law of three states. Every sociologist is aware that the three states are the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. What, however, is the 'law of the three states'?

In the next section, we shall try to answer Gane's question albeit with some trepidation. For Gane posed this question in his book *Auguste Comte* published in 2006 with the remark that 'no satisfactory account of [the law of the three states] has ever been written.' He also goes on to say that 'There is no book in English or French which currently offers a reliable introduction to Comte's sociological thought.' The claim is a bit unnerving indeed!

1.3 THE LAW OF THE THREE STAGES OR THREE STATES :

Preliminaries

A brief exposition of the law of the three stages will follow below based mainly on Comte's *Course in positive philosophy*. Warren Schmaus' article 'A reappraisal of Comte's three-state law' published in the journal *History and theory* in 1982 and Mike Gane's 2006 book cited above. However, there is a need to clarify a few preliminary points in regard to the three-state law.

i. *Is it the law of three stages or the law of three states?*

How should this law be called? Is it the law of the three *stages* or the law of the three *states*? Gane makes the following observation in this connection : 'There is a long running debate about how to translate Comte's French terms, *lois des trios etats*: should this be law of three stages or three states? In [my] book I have chosen 'three states' as Comte himself could certainly have used another French term if he had wanted to signal stages (*estapes*).' According

to Gane, the correct expression is : law of three states. In many texts on Comte, however, 'law of three stages' is used instead. To avoid confusion, we have retained both the expressions regarding them as interchangeable.

ii. *Did Comte invent the law or simply borrow it from his predecessors?*

It is well known that the law of the three stages or states is not entirely original with Comte; there are clear intimations of the idea in Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-81), Marquis de Condorcet (1793-94), and Henry Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825). It is undeniable that Comte derived his three-state law from these thinkers. At the same time, as Warren Schmaus has pointed out, it was not 'a simple case of plagiarism' or stealing. Here is Schmaus' comment on Comte in relation to Turgot:

The three-state law is not entirely original with Comte. It was first proposed in 1750 by Turgot...The latter conceives of it as a generalization concerning the progression of different types of explanatory hypotheses which have been used by man. However, I believe that it would be a mistake to charge Comte with a simple case of plagiarism. Emile Littre, in an attempt to defend his former master from this charge, points out that Turgot does not integrate this law into his philosophical system as does Comte. In fact, Turgot does not even conceive of this succession of three states as constituting a law.

In other words, Comte takes over an idea from his predecessors and transforms it by making it a part of his philosophical system. In Turgot or Condorcet, there is only a succession of states signalling the advance of human knowledge; in Comte this succession assumes the status of a law well grounded in philosophical theory.

The question of Comte's relationship with Saint-Simon is however much more complex as Comte had been his close associate and disciple. Adams and Sydie refer to the views of Markham and Durkheim on this relationship:

Markham insists that Saint-Simon was the first to outline the positivist understanding of stages of historical evolution and that the Law of Three Stages 'pompously announced by Comte as an original discovery, is merely a precise formulation of St-Simon's argument'. Durkheim also pointed out that in Saint-Simon's work the 'entire program of positive philosophy and positive sociology' is sketched out.

J.P.S. Uberoi, the distinguished Indian sociologist, concurs with Durkheim: 'Henry Comte de Saint-Simon was the first prophet of the industrial age and of socialism, and was the first founder of sociology. He was a liberal nobleman who got involved in some dubious events of the French Revolution. Saint-Simon was the first man who promulgated the positivist philosophy as a system and by that name, whatever might be said to the contrary by the supporters of Comte, who was the former's secretary and 'adopted son' for seven years from

1817 until their quarrel in 1824.'

In her article 'A new look at Auguste Comte', Mary Pickering (1997) mentions that the relationship between Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte is one of the five problem areas in Comtean studies. Perhaps it will not be inappropriate to let Mike Gane have the last word on the matter: 'How much [Comte] owed to Saint-Simon is not in doubt, what is clear is that the ideas he inherited were given a radical unity and coherence, a new idiom, not found in the fragmentary essays of Saint-Simon.' In a way, it is the same point earlier made by Warren Schmaus: Turgot, Condorcet and Saint-Simon had anticipated the law of the three stages, but Comte was able to develop it further and integrate it into his philosophical system.

iii. *Is there one version of the law or are there many?*

It is generally believed that Comte framed his three-state law in 1822 once and for all and never ever revised it thereafter. This is not true. Mike Gane, who has traced the vicissitudes of the law in Comte's writings, confirms that 'Many versions of the law were worked out in his writings from 1822 up till his death in 1857.' Writes Gane: 'At a certain point I became aware that Comte's law of three states could be read as a law of two states, or a law of five or six states, depending on Comte's own thinking. Or it could be read as a law of two states and five states simultaneously depending on how a state was defined.'

It will be legitimate to hypothesise that there is unity in the variety of Comte's formulations of the three-state law. He does believe that mankind everywhere moves through the theological, metaphysical, and positive states, but apparently he expresses the idea in different ways. This is not to imply that the different versions of the law encountered in the writings of Comte are devoid of meaning or significance. Nevertheless, the unity underlying the different versions of the law ought not to be ignored or underemphasised.

The account that follows will describe the three-state law and also take note of its varied versions dug out by Mike Gane.

The law of the three states : Progress of human mind

The three-state law is the fundamental or overarching doctrine of Comte's philosophical system; no aspect of Comte's positive philosophy, sociology or polity will make sense except with reference to it. Comte calls it the Law of Human Progress and defines it succinctly in the *Course* as follows: 'the human mind, by its nature, successively employs in each one of its researches three methods of philosophizing, of which the character is essentially different and even radically opposed: at first [i] the theological method, then [ii] the metaphysical method, and finally [iii] the positive method.'

The law posits that, in its historical progression, human mind passes through

three states or stages - the theological, the metaphysical and the positive - signifying three distinct methods of philosophising, which can be traced through every branch of human intellectual work. But what is meant by 'methods of philosophising'? They are ways of understanding and explaining the world. Warren Schmaus adds a gloss:

Comte characterizes each of these "methods of philosophizing" in terms of the explanatory goals man sets for himself in each state. Etymologically speaking, to use a method is to follow a path. As we choose our roads according to our destination, so, too, are the paths taken by philosophers chosen in accordance with their goals. Comte assumes that the basic goal of all philosophers is the explanation of natural phenomena. Philosophers differ in their goals to the extent to which they differ in what they will accept as an explanation.

Thus, the three states represent three modes of explanation of natural phenomena, which are not only different, but also radically opposed. They are spelt out below *seriatim*.

1.3.1 The theological state :

The theological method was the first to arise in human history. It leads to explanations of natural phenomena which posit supernatural entities with causal efficacy. In Comte's words:

In the theological state, the human mind, essentially directing its researches towards the intimate nature of beings, the first and final causes of all the effects which strike it, in a word, towards absolute knowledge, represents the phenomena to itself as produced by the direct and continuous action of more or less numerous supernatural entities, of which the arbitrary intervention explains all the apparent anomalies of the universe.

In the theological stage, human mind tries to find out "why" things happen as they do and searches for the origins, the purpose and the hidden nature of things by assuming that all phenomena are produced by supernatural beings. 'Matter is conceived of as utterly passive,' writes Schmaus, 'with the supernatural beings supplying its active principles.' In the theological vision, the entire universe is little more than divine play: 'The course of nature appears as a series of miracles performed by higher powers governing the visible world,' writes Kolakowski.

Following the lead of Henri Benjamin Constant de Rebecque's *De la religion, considérée dans sa source, ses formes, et ses développements* (1825-1831), Comte further divides the theological state into the fetishistic, polytheistic and monotheistic substates. In the fetishistic phase, says Comte, 'man conceives of all external bodies as animated by a life analogous to his own.' This is

anthropomorphism: investing each and every object with human qualities. In due course, fetishism gives way to polytheism or belief in many gods and polytheism yields to monotheism, belief in a Supreme Being. These transitions happen by a process of abstraction, as Schmaus explains:

The human mind moves through these three substates by a process of abstraction; for example, the dryads [nymphs or spirits] assigned to each tree come to be replaced by the god of the forest, who eventually gives way to a Supreme Being. Matter is conceived as utterly passive, with the supernatural beings supplying its active principles.

In the monotheistic state, these principles emanate from a Supreme Being.

Monotheism is the culmination of the theological or fictive state. How does it pass to the next, metaphysical state? Note what Schmaus has said above: **[a]** that matter is passive; **[b]** that supernatural beings supply its active principles; and **[c]** that, in the monotheistic state, these principles come from a Supreme Being (i.e. God). Now, continues Schmaus, 'By developing the habit of mentioning only these active principles, and not the Divinity, when explaining natural phenomena, the human mind in the monotheistic state sets the stage for the metaphysical state. These active principles begin to be conceived of as entities in their own right.' Human mind moves to a still higher level of abstraction and enters the metaphysical state also called the abstract state by Auguste Comte.

1.3.2 The metaphysical state :

This is how Comte defines the metaphysical state in the *Course* :

In the metaphysical state, which is basically but a simple modification of the first, the super-natural agents are replaced by abstract forces, veritable entities (personified abstractions) inherent in the various beings of the world, and conceived of as capable of engendering by themselves all the observed phenomena, of which the explanation in that case consists in assigning the corresponding entity for each one.

According to Comte, in the metaphysical state, *which is but a simple modification of the theological state*, abstract forces replace supernatural beings as causal agents. Schmaus and Kolakowski elaborate:

The metaphysical state differs from the theological state not so much with respect to the direction which it gives to philosophizing; it still proffers explanations in terms of causal entities. Instead, the difference between the two states merely concerns the sort of causal entities which each posits (Schmaus).

A new stage of development is ushered in with the second, or metaphysical state. Now the human mind has become mature enough not to look for

supernatural causes of events. It still enquires into the why of phenomena, but it accounts for what happens differently, by creating secular or natural divinities, as it were, which man now holds responsible for the observed facts: 'forces', 'qualities', 'powers', 'properties' and other such constructs characteristic of the metaphysically oriented stage of science (Kolakowski).

The basic goal of the metaphysical method remains the same as that of theology: the attainment of absolute knowledge through causal explanation; only the nature of causes posited undergoes a change. Instead of spirits and gods, now abstract 'forces', 'qualities', 'powers' or 'properties' are posited as causal entities. However, these causal entities eventually merge into "a single great general entity, *nature*, seen as the unique source of all phenomena":

"The theological system has reached the highest perfection of which it is capable, when it has substituted the providential action of a single being for the varied play of numerous independent divinities who had been conceived in primitive times. Similarly, the end point of the metaphysical system consists of conceiving, in place of separate particular entities, a single great general entity, *nature*, seen as the unique source of all phenomena (Comte).

The metaphysical state undergoes a development similar to that of preceding state, culminating in a kind of secular monotheism, which compresses the multiplicity of occult powers into the single overall concept of 'nature', regarded as capable of accounting for all the facts (Kolakowski).

The abstract state of metaphysics is a state of transition between theology and positivism or modern science. As a mediation, therefore, it continues as well as undermines theology at the same time. In fact, as Mike Gane argues, Comte defines the metaphysical state 'as a hybrid state, a state without its own principle. It exists because of the combined and conflictual action of other modes of thought that make it rotate, effect the revolution.' Metaphysics is thus the terrain of struggle between theology and science.

Gane also explains why the theological state could not move directly to the positive state, that is, why the metaphysical state was necessary:

Comte's theory suggests that the development of knowledge can never proceed directly from a theological to a positive state in one revolutionary step - the transition is too abrupt, the abyss too wide. Progression is possible from the theological to the metaphysical states, but that is not due to the action of an internal logic, simply the human rationality unfolding itself. The progression from the theological to metaphysical forms is actually the result of the external development of positive reason in the sciences.

First, the human mind cannot jump from the theological to the positive state because the difference or distance between the two states is too great. Second, it is the 'external development of positive reason in the sciences' that pushes

history forward and effects the transition from the theological to the metaphysical state. The progression is not due to the action of any internal logic.

However that be, as Kolakowski writes, 'The metaphysical conception of the world contributed to the advance of knowledge greatly in several fields, and its terminal phase paved the way for the turning point in human history - the opening of a third state, the positive era.'

1.3.3 The positive state :

The transition from the theological to the metaphysical state is gradual, but the transition from the latter to the positive state represents a radical change for Comte. In the positive or scientific state, the search for absolute knowledge is given up and man seeks, as Schmaus puts it, 'explanations of natural phenomena in terms of general facts concerning invariable relations among phenomena, rather than in terms of causes or essences.' Here is Comte on the nature of the positive state :

Finally, in the positive state, the human mind, recognizing the impossibility of obtaining absolute notions, surrenders all claims to search for the origin and the destination of the universe, to attach itself solely to the discovery, by the well-combined usage of reasoning and observation, of their actual laws, which is to say their invariable relations of succession and similitude. The explanation of facts reduced in this case to its real terms, is henceforth nothing more than the linkage established between the various particular phenomena and some general facts of which the progress of science tends more and more to diminish the number.

The positive mind no longer asks why things happen as they do; it does not seek to explain phenomena in terms of causes or essences, supernatural or metaphysical; and it declines to accept feeling and imagination or ratiocination and speculative thought as appropriate methods of cognitive inquiry. In the positive state, human mind asks [a] *how phenomena arise and what course they take* and [b] seeks to discover the invariable laws that govern phenomena -- the relations of succession (diachrony) and similitude (synchrony) that subsist between facts - [c] by using reasoning and observation in tandem.

The positive mind no longer asks why, ceases to speculate on the hidden nature of things. It asks how phenomena arise and what course they take; it collects facts and is ready to submit to facts; it does not permit deductive thinking to be carried too far, and subjects it to the continuous control of objective facts. It does not employ terms that have no counterpart in reality. Its sole aim is to discover invariable universal laws governing phenomena in time, and for this purpose it makes use observation, experiment and calculation. The positive spirit leads not only to certainty, insofar as certainty

is accessible to man, but also to the abolition of the illusory certainty and satisfaction that use of empirically uncontrolled terms designating metaphysical divinities gave rise to.

Humility in the face of compelling facts and practical inspiration - such are the distinctive features of the positive intellect (Kolakowski).

The positive method is able to triumph over theology and metaphysics insofar as it yields knowledge that allows man to predict and control nature. The truth of positive knowledge is affirmed by its empirical nature as well as by its utility for humankind.

The 'ultimate perfection of the positive system' would be reached, writes Comte, when all phenomena could be represented as 'particular aspects of a single general fact-such as Gravitation for instance.' The high point of positivism would be the discovery of a single law capable of explaining all observed facts. It is easy to see that in each of the three epochs of history described above, the tendency of human mind is to unify explanatory principles whether in the form of God, Nature, or an all-encompassing Law.

Check your progress 1

- Notes :**
- i. Use space below for your answers.
 - ii. Compare your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.

1. Briefly describe the law of the three states.

2. What is the theological state? How does it differ from the positive state?

The law of the three states : Progress of the sciences

Comte maintains that his three-state law 'can not be suitably understood if one does not in its application combine it with the encyclopedic formula'. By encyclopaedic formula, Comte means his six-fold classification or hierarchy of the sciences. Schmaus explains how the sciences progress through the three states:

Comte believes that all of the theoretical sciences can be subsumed under the following six headings: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology. The order in which these are named is the order in which man has successively applied first the theological and then the metaphysical and finally the positive method to their study. Thus Comte allows for the possibility, say, that man could have simultaneously used the positive method in mathematics, the metaphysical method in physics and the theological method in biology... Comte never claims that our entire systems of beliefs passes as a whole from one state to the next.

Nor is he dogmatic about there being six and only six sciences, now and for all time... Comte himself adds a seventh science, that of morality, to his classificatory scheme in the *Système de politique positive*. He will allow for any number of sciences in his hierarchy, with any number of subdivisions within each science, as long as they are ordered in accordance with the same principle. This principle calls for the sciences to be classified in the order prescribed by their degrees of generality, simplicity, abstraction, and the degree of independence of the phenomena which form their explanatory realms.

Schmaus makes some very important points. *First*, Comte classifies sciences under six headings, but he is not dogmatic about there being only six sciences: 'One cannot objectively fix the number of sciences,' writes Comte. *Second*, all sciences develop through the three states of theology, metaphysics and positivism, but their rate of development varies. Why? Comte orders the sciences - from mathematics to sociology - in terms of decreasing generality, simplicity and independence. The more general, simple and independent a science, the greater is its rate of development: 'The lower sciences develop first: a form of inquiry progresses to the positive stage at a rate that is greater the less complex it is, the less its dependence on others, and the greater its distance from human affairs,' writes Peter Halfpenny. *Third*, and this is a corollary of the preceding point, Comte never claims that societies or cultures as a whole pass through the three states.

Comte's encyclopaedic formula, which organises the sciences into a system, demonstrates and confirms the three-state law that is the founding discovery of sociology as well as its central object of investigation. In fact, scientific development or the growth of positive reason is the key to the historical

progression from fetishism to positivism. The intellectual evolution of man involves both the steady accumulation of positive knowledge *and* the displacement of cognitive methods represented by theology and metaphysics. At the same time, it will be a mistake to regard theology and metaphysics as errors; they had their own justification:

From study of these laws sociologists and historians can demonstrate that earlier, transcended phases of human evolution were not 'errors' , but had, so to speak, their own rationale; they were inevitable stages of development and the ideas produced in them were true - that is, were adequate to the totality of needs felt in each successive epoch. Comte's famous Law of the Three States cannot be grasped unless we keep clearly in mind that it describes sociological realities, treats the content of human knowledge as a component of social life (Kolakowski; emphasis added).

The three-state law is inexorable and universal and governs the development of all societies, western and non-western, although Comte chooses to concentrate on Europe and France in his analyses for being the 'vanguard' of humanity. The non-western societies, he believes, represent earlier states through which western Europe has already passed. It follows that different societies move from one state to another at different rates or velocities. But why? Comte attributes the differential rates to the variables of race, climate, and political action.

Following the three-state law, Comte constructs, writes Mike Gane, 'an evolutionary chain of cultures: [i] ancient Egyptian fetishism, ancient Greek and Roman polytheism, medieval Catholicism, [ii] European enlightenment metaphysical culture (driven by the fundamental force of scientific revolution), and [iii] the revolution in France which brings civilisation to the brink of the scientific or 'positive' polity.' Roughly, theology predominates before 1300 CE, metaphysics between 1300-1800 CE, and positivism from 1800 CE onwards. Comte had witnessed only the beginning of the positive era and not its consolidation. Even in the contemporary France, he had noticed the co-presence of diverse modes of thought, positive and non-positive. Therefore, the picture of the positive society that he paints in his book *The positive polity* is mostly utopian.

Comte is clear that in all societies, theological, metaphysical and positive modes of thought coexist, albeit in tension. It is this tension that propels history forward, with the growth in positive reason providing the necessary steam or stimulus:

Comte by no means holds to the view that society as a whole is permeated by a single mode of thought at one time. He opens the problem of how different modes of thought coexist together at any given time, in any one society. But second, and this is more fundamental, the law does, against all appearances,

not authorise a conception of progression as a single continuous cultural movement...

In fact, each state in the three state sequence is also defined by the predominance of a form of knowledge in each society concerned. As the different forms of knowledge are not neutral towards one another, the internal structure of society is always in tension. The theological and positive forms of knowledge, in fact, are inherently incompatible forms; between them, as methods and indeed modes of thinking, there is in his view permanent and irreconcilable antagonism (Gane).

It is obvious from what Mike Gane says that no society can move from one state to another enbloc and, therefore, the process of humanity arriving at the complete positive state will probably be very, very long, if not actually interminable.

This brings us to the consideration of how Comte uses the three-state law of intellectual and scientific development 'as a basis to argue for the existence of laws of progress governing other aspects of society' (Schmaus). In other words, we need to see how Comte applies the law to social dynamics, or the changes over time in all social structures.

The law of the three states : Progress of human society

How does intellectual development, as symbolised by the three-state law, relate to or affect other aspects of social development? Comte's views on the matter are complex : on one side, he regards the progress of science as the 'necessary preponderant principle' in relation to other aspects of society; on the other, he maintains that the laws of social dynamics 'as a whole determine the fundamental march of human development.' Raymond Aron makes Comte's standpoint all the more explicit :

....this does not mean that the movement of intelligence determines the transformation of other social phenomena. Comte did not believe in the determination of the social entity by intelligence any more than Montesquieu believed in the determination of the social entity by the character of the political regime. The movement of history, for both men, is effected by action and reactions between the various segments of the total social reality. If we consider Comte's social dynamics... we see how the transition from one stage to the next is effected primarily by means of the opposition between different segments of the society. Depending on circumstances, the cause which provokes disintegration of a social entity and the advent of the next stage may be in politics, in economics, or in intelligence.

Nevertheless, the primacy of the development of the intelligence is valid for Comte because (a) the major stages in the history of the race are determined

by the dominant way of thinking; (b) the final stage is that of universal positivism, and (c) the chief instrument of human development is the constant criticism which nascent and maturing positivism brings to bear on the temporary synthesis of fetishism and theology (*italics in the original*).

Although, in the ultimate analysis, it is the dialectical interaction between different social segments that determines the march of human development, the primacy of intelligence in the process is hardly in doubt. Warren Schmaus writes: '[Comte] argues that one of the aspects of human social development must be "spontaneously preponderant" over the others and that this aspect will "habitually impress upon all the others an indispensable first impetus".' Further: 'Other aspects of society must progress in order to keep pace with the scientific developments, so as to avoid "the entire decomposition of the system".'

Accordingly, at different points in his intellectual career, Comte arranged developments in politics, morality and other social aspects into diachronic series in conformity with the three-state law. In one of his early *opuscules* or pamphlets written in 1820 and published under the name of Saint-Simon, Comte holds the view that 'European history could be read as a long transition, moving from a military-theological feudal system to a system based on industry and science' (Gane). In coupling together theology and militarism in the feudal system and science and industry in the modern system, Comte assumes not only that the two series - the intellectual and the politico-economic - run parallel to each other, but also that they are internally connected. Gane explains:

Comte conceives the industrial-scientific system as establishing itself externally to and in direct competition with the feudal-theocratic order. In fact the analysis is presented very much as a competition between articulated couples in which the feudal couple (theological and military) is replaced by the modern couple (scientific and industrial). As couples their component elements rise or fall together.

Although Comte gives up conjoining different social series in his later works, he continues to subscribe to the view that not only science, but all other segments of social reality manifest progress. According to Schmaus, Comte was required to establish that such indeed was the case:

Ultimately, Comte felt the need to establish the existence of progress in at least three aspects of society in order to confirm his hypothesis that human society as a whole manifests progress ...Scientific progress, as characterized by his three-state law, constitutes Comte's first case, and he cites industrial progress as a second case. By his own admission, he still needs a third case of progress in order to confirm this hypothesis that all aspects of society

exhibit progress. Comte attempts to argue specifically for the existence of a law governing political progress...

Comte argues in the *Course in positive philosophy* that it would be totally irrational to regard 'scientific activity as subject to positive laws and, on the other hand, political activity as arbitrary; because, basically the latter, in virtue of its superior complications, dominating the individual perturbations more, ought to be still more predetermined than the other, where personal genius certainly exercises more command.' In a domain where greater number of people are involved, such as politics, the probability of law-governed behaviour increases all the more. Such is Comte's argument.

It is in his *Positive Polity*, nearly fourteen years later, that Comte postulates multi-state laws of political progress:

One of these laws governs the development of political and economic activity from the conquering or military state, through the defensive or feudal state and finally the industrial state. [ii] Another aspect of society is governed by a law which prescribes for the development of moral sentiments from the domestic to the civil and finally to the universal state. Both of these laws, which are modelled on the three-state law of scientific development, represent homogeneous, linear series (Schmaus; italics added).

Thus, Comte shows that laws of succession or progress also exist in social domains other than science and that these laws correspond with the fundamental three-state law. The correspondence is such that Mary Pickering is able to proclaim sweepingly that "The main law of sociology, or more exactly, social dynamics, was Comte's famous law of three stages. This law stated that every branch of knowledge, and every social and political structure went through a theological, metaphysical, and positive stage of history."

N.S.Timasheff presents all the correlations that Comte established between 'the basic, intellectual stages and stages in the development of man's material life, types of social units, types of social order, and prevailing sentiments' as follows:

Intellectual phase	Material phase	Type of social unit	Type of order	Prevailing sentiment
Theological	Military	The family	Domestic	Attachment
Metaphysical	Legalistic	The state	Collective	Veneration
Positive	Industrial	Race(humanity)	Universal	Benevolence

Timasheff also mentions the factors which Comte believes have contributed to man's intellectual and social development. Boredom and fear of death are

supposed to be main factors of intellectual progress, while the increase in the density of the population is a factor of progress in general. As for the differential rate of progress across societies, Comte attributes it to 'differential endowment of the races and, presumably, white superiority; the role of climatic differences, with the conditions in the Mediterranean basin being the most favourable for progress; and the view that political action may eventually accelerate or retard progress.'

Check Your Progress 1

1. What is meant by the 'encyclopaedic formula'?

2. How do politics and morals progress according to Comte?

Concluding remarks: Mike Gane's view of the three-state law

In the preceding sections, we have discussed the three-state law and some of its important aspects on the assumption that Comte offered a single version of the law never to change it thereafter. Is this assumption right? Mike Gane for one holds that it is not. According to Gane many versions of the law were worked out in Comte's writings from 1822 up till his death in 1857.

On the basis of a meticulous investigation of the entire corpus of Comte's writings in original French, Gane comes to the conclusion that 'The law of the three states was discovered once, but was rediscovered and developed in many different directions for varying purposes.' Gane discerns three successive formulations of the the law in Comte as follows:

First formulations:	I (fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism), II (metaphysics), III positivism;
Transitional sequence:	I (fetishism), II (onto-theologism that includes metaphysics), III (positivism);
Final sequence:	I (fetishism), II ('theologism'), III (positivity-fetishism).

What does the above detail suggest?

Firstly, Comte appears unsure whether to retain metaphysics as a separate state or combine it with higher theology. Gane throws light on Comte's dilemma in regard to the metaphysical state: 'Comte had great difficulty in deciding what was normal and abnormal about this long revolutionary transition, and the tendency of his thought was to increasingly reduce its significance from one of the great principal stages of the three-state law to a passing transitory episode.' In any case, whether metaphysics is treated as a *principal stage* or a *transitory episode* by Comte, it hardly compromises the basic character of the three-state law as a theory and description of human progress from theology to positivity via a necessary transitional state.

Secondly, in the final sequence above, Comte places fetishism both at the beginning of the series and at the end alongside positivity. What does it signify? It is well known that Comte's intellectual career passed through two phases, those of [a] Positive Philosophy and [b] Positive Polity. In the first phase, Comte employs the method of *objective philosophical analysis* to 'complete and coordinate the system of sciences'; in the second phase, he uses the *subjective method* to 'complete the system of ethics and found the new Religion of Humanity'. In the first phase, intellect, reason or science is all in all for Comte; in the second, he realises the inadequacy of positivist reason and science and lays emphasis on the role of feeling in human life. 'In the first, it is intellect and objectivity that play the main role. In the second, it is 'feeling' and subjectivity,' writes Gane.

Comte does not discard or wish to discard the objective method in favour of the subjective one (or *vice versa*), but would like a skilful combination of the two: 'It is by a skilful combination of these methods used alternatively, the one beginning where the other leaves off,' writes Comte, 'that the defectiveness of each can be remedied; and thus the best use made of our small supply of intellectual force, so inadequate when left to itself for the social problems with which it has to deal.' The two methods are, for Comte, but two aspects of positivism or, in Gane's vocabulary, two levels of positivisation.

With the subjective turn in his second intellectual phase, Comte increasingly emphasises coordination between intellect, feeling and action or *head, heart and hands* in human life and thought. Accordingly, he realises that the positive polity of his dreams would require *science* as well as a new *religion of humanity* and an *ethics of altruism* to sustain itself. And in line with this triadic logic, he is also able to see that scientific or *spiritual elite* (the sociologists), *women* and the *proletariat* would form the three complementary pillars of the positivist regime, his ideal sociocracy.

Where does the above detour leave us with respect to the positivity-fetishism couple in Gane's final sequence? As Comte discovers the value of subjective method and feeling for human life, so does he discover simultaneously the value of fetishism. He begins to sense a profound rapport or affinity between positivism and fetishism, both of which are united in rejecting causal explanation of natural phenomena in terms of supernatural beings, occult powers or abstract forces. From the perspective of the subjective method, fetishism now emerges as far superior to theology and metaphysics:

Emerging in this analysis is Comte's new judgement that, the earliest methods, those of fetishism, are now judged far superior to those of what he now calls theologism (which includes polytheism, monotheism and, in effect metaphysics). Although theologism establishes the institution of the priesthood, it was fetishism that recognised the power of moral regulation in personal life, and even as a general order of knowledge was superior to theologism.

Positivism approaches natural phenomena objectively and tries to apprehend the invariable laws that govern them. Fetishism, on the other hand, treats phenomena as if they were human and approaches them with subjective feeling. Comte now wants to combine the two methods - the objective and the subjective, intellect and feeling, positivism and fetishism.

Fetishism as a method of objective comprehension has its place only at the beginning of man's intellectual journey, but fetishism as the method of feeling can happily coexist with positivism. 'It is important to recognise,' writes Gane, 'that what Comte is really saying is that the alignments in the methodological warfare have changed. Theology and metaphysics are now aligned against a new 'coupling': fetishism and positivism.'

Does this new coupling compromise the three-state law? That is the real question for us at this point. And our answer is no, it does not. That human intelligence and human society progress from theology to positivism is accepted by Comte. Only, in the later phase of his career, Comte enlarges the scope of positivism to include not only science, but also the ethics of duty and love

and the religion of humanity. His religion and ethics are consistent with the spirit of science and industry in the same measure as they are opposed to theology and metaphysics.

Comte had presented the three-state law 'in different ways' between 1822 and 1857, but without questioning its fundamental validity at any time. At the same time, we need to appreciate that, in the final analysis, the highest stage of human evolution - positivism - includes science as well as the religion of humanity and the ethics of altruism within its fold.

1.4 Let Us Sum up :

The present lesson has described the central doctrine of Comte's positive philosophy and positive sociology, namely, the law of the three stages or three states, which governs the progress of human mind and human society from the theological, through the metaphysical, to the positive state. It is important to remember, *firstly*, that societies do not move from one state to another *en bloc*; rather, different societies and different segments within each society progress towards positivity at different rates or velocities. The different modes of thought, represented by theology, metaphysics, and positivism or science, coexist in all societies and at all times, although a particular mode of thought may predominate in any given context. *Secondly*, it is equally important to remember that in his later intellectual phase, [a] Comte realises the inadequacy of reason and science, [b] lays emphasis on the coordination of intellect, feeling and action and [c] enlarges the scope of positivism to include not only science, but also the positive religion of humanity and the positive ethics of altruism. And lastly, while Comte presented the three-state law in different ways between 1830 and 1853, introducing interesting modifications at times, he never questioned its fundamental validity.

By way of evaluation of Comte's Law of Human Progress, we may cite the opinions of E.E. Evans-Prichard, Mary Pickering, and Mike Gane:

We must pass judgement on him for [i] *his total disregard of facts...* He also been rebuked for his [ii] *mania for systematization*. The most damaging criticism is, I think, [iii] *his post factum interpretation of history* - and of a limited history in a particular region and restricted in time - as a sequence of events which was 'inevitable' 'inexorable', 'necessary', allowing nothing to choice and intention, making man the spectator and not the shaper of his destiny. It has fairly been asked whether Comte could, with all his talk of methodology and laws, have predicted any event in history, even events of fundamental significance in the history of mankind, those great movements of which he spoke so much. Certainly [iv] *his predictions were wide of the mark*.

But in spite of its defects it is true what John Morley said of the Cours, that

'This analysis of social evolution will continue to be regarded as one of the greatest achievements of human intellect' (Evans-Pritchard; italics added).

Comte's philosophy is authoritarian, dogmatic, and grandiose. Many of his so-called scientific assertions, including the law of three stages, are replete with assumptions. Paradoxically, the very diffuseness of his endeavor caused him to lose support in his own day. The left found him illiberal and religious, while the right considered him blasphemous and anarchical (Pickering 2001).

Comtean theory is not only a displaced paradigm, but that its methods and its account of science might also be said to be justly consigned to history - not just the result of advancement in any progressive discipline, but because there was a fatal flaw in the conception of the sociocratic project itself (Gane).

1.5 Key Words :

Anthropomorphism: To endow natural phenomena with human qualities is anthropomorphism. It is an attitude characteristic of the theological state, especially fetishism.

Ethics of altruism: Altruism is a term coined by Comte. To live for others is altruism. It is the direct opposite of egoism implying self-centredness or selfishness. Comte realised in the later part of his career that the positive society needs the ethics of altruism as much as it needs science and industry.

Fetishism: It's the first stage in man's intellectual journey, where 'man conceives of all external bodies as animated by a life analogous to his own.' In the fetishistic sub-state of theology, there are no gods and no priests either. Human mind does not seek explanation of natural phenomena in terms of causes, but rather approaches them with feeling. Comte first thought that in fetishism 'the religious spirit is most directly opposed to the scientific'. But his view changed between 1840 and 1853 and he came to think that 'of the different forms of the fictitious synthesis [i.e. theology], fetishism is logically and scientifically the best'. 'Indeed, between fetishism and positivism he discovers a radical unity. The first is spontaneous positivism and the second is systematic,' writes Gane.

Monotheism: Monotheism is belief in one Supreme Being. It is the highest phase of theology and Comte sometimes combines it with metaphysics. In the theological state, 'matter is conceived as utterly passive, with the supernatural beings supplying its active principles. In the monotheistic state, these principles emanate from a Supreme Being' (Schmaus).

Metaphysical state: The state of metaphysics or metaphysical ontology is the state of transition between theology and positivism. In this state, human mind seeks causal explanation of phenomena in terms of abstract forces. Ratiocination or speculative thought is the dominant intellectual orientation

of this era. Socially, the metaphysical stage is marked by defensive militarism, and legalism.

Objective method and subjective method: Comte's work passed through two phases or levels of positivisation. In the first phase, Comte employed the objective method to 'complete and coordinate the system of sciences'; in the second phase, he uses the subjective method to 'complete the system of ethics and found the new Religion of Humanity'. In the first phase, intellect, reason or science is all in all for Comte; in the second, he realises the inadequacy of positivist reason and science and lays emphasis on the role of feeling in human life. Comte realised that positivism is perfected when it skilfully combines objective with subjective method, intellect with feeling and science with the religion of humanity and the ethics of altruism.

Polytheism: Belief in many gods or divinities is polytheism - the second phase of theology intermediate between fetishism and monotheism.

Positive state: The final stage of man's intellectual journey, when man abandons the quest for causal explanation in terms of supernatural beings or abstract forces and seeks to discover the invariable laws governing phenomena through observation and reasoning. It is also known as the scientific state or the state of positivity.

Relations of succession and similitude: Relations between facts across time are relations of succession; relations that subsist between facts at a given point of time are relations of similitude. The word similitude is also translated as 'coexistence', 'similarity' or 'resemblance'. Comte divides his sociology into 'social statics' and 'social dynamics'; the former studies order or the relations of coexistence, while the latter studies progress or the relations of succession.

Religion of humanity: The term 'religion' changed meaning in Comte's work. Prior to the phase of Positive polity, religion had for Comte the same meaning as theology. Later, religion was detached from theology and came 'to mean the activity of creating and recreating social and intellectual unity in society through the impulses of sympathy' (Gane). The religion of humanity is the religion of the positive era, which has Humanity or 'Great Being' (and not God or Supreme Being) as its object of worship. Humanity is conceived, according to Gane, 'as the totality of the highest representatives of humankind'.

Theological state: Also labelled as the fictive, fictional or fictitious state, the theological state is the starting point of the social series represented by the three-state law. It is divided into three sub-states: fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. In the state of theology or theologism, human mind explains phenomena in terms of supernatural causes; feeling and imagination take precedence over reasoning and observation; and the social order is dominated by militarism.

1.6 Model Answers to Check Your Progress :

Check your progress 1

1. Also known as the Law of Human Progress, the three-state law is the fundamental or overarching doctrine of Comte's philosophical system; no aspect of Comte's positive philosophy, sociology or polity will make sense except with reference to it. According to this law, human mind and human society progress from the theological, through the metaphysical, to the positive state.

2. Also labelled as the fictive, fictional or fictitious state, the theological state is the starting point of the social series represented by the three-state law. It is divided into three sub-states: fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. In the state of theology or theologism, human mind explains phenomena in terms of supernatural causes; feeling and imagination take precedence over reasoning and observation; and the social order is dominated by militarism. In contrast, positive state is the final stage of man's intellectual journey, when man abandons the quest for causal explanation in terms of supernatural beings or abstract forces and seeks to discover the invariable laws governing phenomena through observation and reasoning. It is also known as *the scientific state* or the state of *positivity*.

Check your progress 2

1. Comte maintains that his three-state law 'can not be suitably understood if one does not in its application combine it with the encyclopedic formula'. By encyclopaedic formula, Comte means his six-fold classification or hierarchy of the sciences including mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology. Later Comte added the science of morals to this list.

Comte orders the sciences - from mathematics to sociology - in terms of decreasing generality, simplicity and independence. The more general, simple and independent a science, the greater is its rate of development. Comte's encyclopaedic formula, which organises the sciences into a system, demonstrates and confirms the three-state law that is the founding discovery of sociology as well as its central object of investigation.

2. According to Schmaus, 'political and economic activity [develop] from the *conquering or military state*, through the *defensive or feudal state* and finally the *industrial state*.[ii] Another aspect of society is society is governed by a law which prescribes for the development of moral sentiments from the *domestic* to the *civil* and finally to the *universal* state. Both of these laws, which are modelled on the three-state law of scientific development, represent homogeneous, linear series (Schmaus; italics added).

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Note: Comte has been cited from Gane (2006) and Schmaus (1982), but occasionally also from Harriet Martineau's The positive philosophy of Auguste Comte (1853) - a freely translated and condensed version of Comte's Cours de philosophie positive (1830-42) now available on the Net. Comte's Cours has never been translated into English in full. Michel Serres has been cited from Gane.

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AUGUSTE COMTE : POSITIVISM

Structure :

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- 2.4** Key words
- 2.5** Model answers to check your progress
- 2.6** Further readings

2.0 Objectives :

The study of this lesson will enable the student to :

- * grasp the distinctive features of Comte's positivism, his positive philosophy as well as positive polity;
- * discover its background; and thus
- * understand the meaning, scope and importance of positivism as the foundation of Comte's thought.

2.1 Introduction :

The previous lesson on the three-state law touched on some aspects of positivism. The law holds that human mind and human society progress dialectically from the theological state, through metaphysics, to the positive or scientific state. In this scheme, the scientific state is the acme of human intelligence.

At first Comte believed that positive science was sufficient as a basis for social reconstruction. This was his position, for instance, in *Course in positive philosophy*. However, in *System of positive polity*, his second major work, he realised that positive philosophy and positive science needed to be complemented by a positive religion of humanity and a positive ethics of altruism and love. "In the *Course*," writes Michel Bourdeau, 'science was transformed into philosophy; in the *System*, philosophy was transformed into religion.'

Thus, positive philosophy and positive polity together constitute and define what Comte termed 'complete positivism'. It is this complete positivism predicated on the coordination between head (intellect), heart (feeling) and hands (action) or, which is the same thing, science, religion and ethics or politics, that is the subject of the present lesson. The lesson will explain the meaning, background and dimensions of positivism as found in the works of Auguste Comte. Positivism has existed before and after Comte; our task is to grasp the specificity of Comte's viewpoint. This lesson will progress from [i] prelude, through [ii] preliminaries, to the discussion of [iii] positivism proper.

2.2.1 Positivism : Prelude

2.2.1.1 Comte's writings on positivism

Comte's system of thought including his positive philosophy as well as positive polity is designated as positivism. Besides the six-volume *Course in positive philosophy* published over a period of twelve years, from 1830 to 1842, three other works usually cited in discussions of Comte's positivism are: *A discourse on the positive spirit* (1844), *A general view of positivism* (1848), and *The catechism of positivist religion* (1852). The first two texts were introductions respectively to a book on astronomy and to *System of positive polity* (1851-54),

but were published separately. The last was a popular work modelled on Christian doctrine manuals.

2.2.1.2 Positivism in perspective : Comte's overall project

Before turning to the nature and dimensions of positivism, it will be appropriate to recall the basic structure or logic of Comte's over-all project. Comte lived in post-revolutionary France, where society had degenerated into complete chaos and where egoism, materialism and corrupt bureaucracy held sway. This had happened because the medieval feudal-catholic order had collapsed irrevocably and no alternative was in sight. Comte saw it as a *crisis of modernity* and a *critical period* in French and global history.

French and European society had to be reconstructed. However, social reconstruction was not possible, Comte argued, until sociology or the positive science of society was created, that is, until the fundamental nature of social order, its statics and dynamics, were understood. It was to this end that Comte undertook the historical survey of the sciences of nature in the light of the three-state law. His intention was three-fold: to understand the method or methods of science; harmonise the sciences; and found the science of sociology, which earlier, following Saint-Simon, he had named Social Physics. These goals were accomplished in the form of an *objective synthesis* called *positive philosophy* with sociology as its apex. 'His goal was maximal,' writes Mike Gane, 'to found a new science [sociology] and to found a new philosophy [positivism].' Sociology was the point of departure as well as the point of arrival for Comte's positive philosophy.

Over time, however, Comte realised that positive philosophy or positive sociology was necessary but not sufficient to form and sustain the new social order based on science and industry; a positive religion and a positive ethics were required too. 'Reassessing his own project,' writes Gane, 'he argued that all attempts to solve the western crisis through science and reason alone only exacerbated it.' He was, therefore, led in the second phase of his intellectual itinerary, to 'complete the system of ethics [and] found the new Religion of Humanity' in combination with positive philosophy.

Comte's religious turn, the turn towards *subjective synthesis*, stemmed from a still deeper realisation that, besides intellect, feeling or emotion has a role in human life. Thus he arrived at his complete positivism, which, as we said earlier, is predicated on a coordination between intellect, feeling and action or science, religion and ethics or politics. This was the time when he revalorised fetishism, prefixed Love to his slogan of Order and Progress, and placed the newly-conceived science of morals above sociology.

All of Comte's theoretical efforts had one goal: rebuilding human society everywhere on positivist lines.

2.2.2 POSITIVISM : PRELIMINARIES

It is best to begin the discussion of positivism by first attending to a few preliminary questions: [i] Why did Comte name his philosophy and polity *positive*? What exactly does the word 'positive' mean? [ii] What are the sources of Comte's complete positivism? [iii] Why did he refuse to identify or align positivism with atheism, materialism or empiricism? The answers to these questions will shed light on certain features of positivism.

2.2.2.1 Why did Comte name his philosophy and polity positive? What exactly does the word mean?

The term positive science was in use before Auguste Comte. It is found, for example, in the writings of Saint-Simon, at one time Comte's mentor, as also in Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences* Part I. Stephen Zeliak, apparently on the authority of Scott Gordon's *The history and philosophy of social science* (1991), believes that the words 'positive science' were first uttered by Madame de Staël. Here is the full quote, which also clarifies the meaning of positive science:

In the context of French social thought, the words *positive science* were first uttered, it seems, by Madame de Staël (1766-1817), the eccentric thinker, writer, socialite, and associate of romantic and scientific utopians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Like others in her circle, Madame de Staël was enthusiastic about the role that scientific method could play in advancing human progress toward the goals of spiritual and material perfection.

Positive science or sciences clearly referred to the natural sciences that had developed in modern Europe from sixteenth or seventeenth century onwards. Comte was perhaps the first to use the expressions positive philosophy and positivism, although evidence in respect of the latter term - positivism - is conflicting. As Robert Scharff has pointed out, Comte's positive philosophy was not so much a philosophy of science as a philosophy about science. It was intended to complete and coordinate the system of the positive sciences including sociology.

It is generally believed that the term positivism was coined by Comte. Leszek Kolakowski, for instance, holds this view in his *Positivist philosophy* as does Peter Halfpenny in *Positivism and sociology* or Jonathan Turner in his paper 'The origins of positivism' included in Ritzer's *Handbook of social theory*. On the other hand, Abraham Kaplan writing in the *Encyclopedia of religion* argues to the contrary:

The term "positivism" was used first by Henry Comte de Saint-Simon to designate scientific method and its extension to philosophy. Adopted by Auguste Comte, it came to designate a great philosophical movement, which in the

second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, was powerful in all countries of the Western world.

Be that as it may, the broad meaning of the term positive is now clear: positive means constructive and scientific in the modern sense of being real and testable. Johan Heilbron writes that as positivism grew into a system after 1834, its meaning also expanded: 'Positive then no longer meant "real" and "testable" but also "useful", "precise" and "certain".' Wernick adds:

As 'positive' and its derivatives acquired a general significance as a label for the whole system, its meaning also considerably expanded. In *Discours sur l'esprit positif* [A discourse on the positive spirit] in 1844 Comte distinguishes at least six elements in its definition - realism, usefulness, certainty, precision, constructiveness and relativity.

The use of the terms positive, positive philosophy and positivism by Comte proclaims above all his allegiance to science and the scientific method of understanding the phenomenal world. Whatever is truly positive or scientific is real, useful, certain, precise, *constructive and* relative at one and the same time.

However, it should be noted that the concept of positive philosophy also had a polemical intent. I. Zeitlin explains:

The term "positive", as Comte employed it in his positive philosophy, was explicitly polemical and intended as an ideological weapon with which to combat the philosophical legacy of the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The critical and destructive principles of negative philosophy were to be discredited and repudiated so that they could be replaced by affirmative and constructive principles of positive philosophy.

In short, the label 'positive' was meant to distinguish Comte's philosophy from the 'negative' philosophy of the French Enlightenment *philosophes* who, despite their support for Reason, Science and Progress, remained arrested within the metaphysical problematic. For example Diderot's 1751 *Encyclopédie*, a veritable symbol of Enlightenment thought, was critiqued by Comte as negative. Andrew Wernick (2006) sums up Comte's critique as follows:

Comte's critique of Diderot's *Encyclopédie* merged, in fact, with his critique of the *philosophes* as a whole... At its core is the charge that the 'pretended unity' of the 1751 *Encyclopédie* was based on a purely 'negative' form of thinking. Negative: not just because its contributors were critical towards the religious and political institutions of the old regime, but because the philosophical foundations of this criticality - politically expressed in the dogmas of individual rights and *le libre examen des consciences* [freedom of conscience] - were themselves virulently anarchic. Such principles could well serve to undermine the arbitrary constructions of custom, authority and faith, but they had no capacity to construct [emphasis added].

2.2.2.2 What are the sources of Comte's complete positivism?

H.E. Barnes points out that Comte's 'chief contribution lay in his remarkable capacity for synthesis and organization rather than in the development of new and original social doctrines.' Karl Marx had recognised as much in 1866. In a letter to Engels, he wrote: 'I am studying Comte on the side just now, as the English and French are making such a fuss of the fellow. What seduces them about him is his encyclopaedic quality, *la synthèse*.'

Comte borrowed elements of positivism from several thinkers preceding him, but synthesised them into a system of his own. In the 57th lesson of his *Course*, Comte mentions Francis Bacon, Galileo and Descartes as intellectual antecedents; in *Positive polity*, he adds another trio of Hume, Kant, and Diderot to the list. Here are some details about what he found useful or inspiring in these thinkers:

Comte singles out three pivotal modern figures as symbols for what the positive, or scientific revolution entails. He cites Bacon for directing philosophy towards *observation*; Descartes for encouraging concern for *method*; and Galileo for pioneering a scientific way of actually "discovering nature's *invariable laws*." He warns, however, that only the combined influence of their teachings leads from metaphysics to positive thought (Robert Scharf).

In the *Politique positive*, Hume, Diderot and Kant are hailed as the trio who made possible. This break from the 'absolutist' notion of causality, though the Kantian outcome still failed to escape altogether the metaphysical orbit (Andrew Wernick).

Thus, the chief ingredients of Comte's *positive philosophy*, namely, [a] observation, [b] method, [c] scientific way of discovering nature's invariable laws and [d] rejection of absolute causality are all of them derived from his predecessors. How about positive politics and positive religion? To be sure, they were also not without antecedents. Andrew Wernick, who has written a masterly work entitled *Auguste Comte and the religion of humanity*, traces the genealogy of Comte's positive religion:

[Comte's] positivism was fashioned both as a scientific systematisation of science and as humanistically demystified religion. To be sure, Comte was not the only cross-over point. Bacon's House of Saloman prefigured the Positivist priesthood. Appeals to natural religion, as an alternative to the prescientific reliance on Authority and Revelation, were a common coin among free thinkers in the century preceding Comte. De Tracy's *Elements d'Ideologie* and Saint-Simon's writings before he met Comte - including the need for a Science of Man and, on that basis, a new synthesis of knowledge to complete the scientific revolution as the industrial-age basis for a moral renovation - show clearly enough that these themes were not original with him. But Comte was the

first to think out, systematically and self-consciously, the integration of both projects.

So, Comte's positive science of knowledge as well as his positive sociology and positive religion were well anticipated by earlier thinkers. Durkheim goes so far as to say that in Saint-Simon's work the 'entire program of positive philosophy and positive sociology' is sketched out. Nonetheless, Wernick's contention that 'Comte was the first to think out, systematically and self-consciously, the integration of the two projects' of science and religion cannot be ignored either.

2.2.2.3 *Why did Comte refuse to identify or align positivism with atheism, materialism or empiricism?*

Comte was careful to distinguish positivism from allied doctrines such as atheism, materialism and empiricism. In *A general view of positivism*, Comte discounted any fundamental affinity or identity between positivism and *atheism*, Comte writes:

I have long ago repudiated all philosophical or historical connection between Positivism and what is called Atheism. But it is desirable to expose the error somewhat more clearly. Atheism, even from the intellectual point of view, is a very imperfect form of emancipation; for its tendency is to prolong the metaphysical stage indefinitely, by continuing to seek for new solutions of Theological problems instead of setting aside all inaccessible researches on the ground of their utter inutility.

Atheism, the belief that God does not exist, is an instance of metaphysical negation of theology and offers only an imperfect emancipation. It falls far short of positivism. Let us note that Comte's view of atheism is very similar to that of Karl Marx, who in his *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* of 1844 thought of atheism as little more than inverted theology.

In the same vein, Comte also makes a distinction between positivism and *materialism*. Positivism, he argues, sets up a hierarchy of sciences and holds fast to the view that facts belonging to a higher-order science cannot be reduced to facts of a lower-order science. For example, social facts, which form the domain of sociology, ought not to be reduced to facts of biology situated at a lower level. Materialism commits the very same reductionist fallacy that positivism explicitly proscribes. But positivism is not spiritualist either, says Comte : "It satisfies and reconciles all that is really tenable in the rival claims of both Materialism and Spiritualism; and, having done this, *it discards them both*. It holds the one to be as dangerous to Order as the other to Progress."

How about empiricism? Is positivism the same as *empiricism*? Empiricism holds that sensory experience directly leads to knowledge without the mediation of

reason or theory. Positivism rejects this position and instead emphasises the dialectic between reason and sense, theory and observation or deduction and induction as a way to positive knowledge of the world. Undoubtedly, science is empirical in the sense of being based on experience or observation, but could there be observation without theory or hypothesis? No, says Comte:

If it is true that every theory must be based upon observed facts, it is equally true that facts cannot be observed without the guidance of some theory. Without such guidance, our facts would be desultory and fruitless; we could not retain them; for the most part we could not even perceive them.

... even in regard to the simplest phenomenon, if we did not begin by anticipating results by making provisional supposition, altogether conjectural in the first instance, with regard to some of the very notions which are the object of inquiry. Hence the necessary introduction of hypotheses into natural philosophy ... without it all discovery of natural laws will be impossible in cases of any degree of complexity; and in all, very slow (quoted in R. Fletcher).

Mike Gane clinches the issue: 'Far from the caricature of a simple obsessive empiricism and drive to accumulate 'facts', Comte's sociologies cannot be understood without their emphasis on theory, hypothesis, fiction, and imagination which in the end quite overwhelmed the initial limitations of the research programme.' Again: 'Far from being an empiricist, he regards abstraction and theory as essential to all cultures and at all times...'

We will conclude this section by pointing out that, in so far as it stresses the sociological or historical dimensions of science, Comtean positivism is incompatible also with neo-positivism or logical positivism of the 20th century and scientism. 'It need hardly be said, writes Wernick, 'that Comte's positivism should be confused neither with 'logical positivism' nor with various more general scientific or objectivist tendencies often referred to as positivist. Some of these tendencies were criticised by Comte himself for their alienated *sechresse* [droughtiness or dryness] or disintegrative *esprit de detail*, or for a *materialisme* that would reduce higher-order phenomena to lower-order ones.' Heilbron is all the more blunt: "Comte's theory was opposed in many ways to the program of the logical positivists. Comte rejected the idea that there existed purely logical criteria or universal methods by which scientific statements could be distinguished once and for all from non-scientific ones. His positivism was historical, not logical, and according to him there was no 'positive method', independent of the practices of the various sciences.' If anything, it is *post-positivism* of recent times that is more in line with Comte's standpoint, which is sometimes referred to, for the sake of symmetry, as *palaeo-positivism*.

With these remarks, we can now turn to Comte's positivism proper including both his positive philosophy and positive polity. It is the former, however,

which will receive our greater attention because, as Michel Bourdeau has said, *Course in positive philosophy* 'remains Comte's major contribution.'

Check Your Progress 1

Notes : i. Use space below for your answers.

ii. Compare your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.

1. A. Who used the words 'positive science' first of all?
 B. What are the six elements Comte distinguishes in the definition of the term 'positive'?

2. Why did Comte refuse to identify positivism with atheism?

3. Mention three thinkers, who influenced Comte's positive philosophy the most.

2.2.3 POSITIVISM PROPER

We can begin with three short statements on the nature of positivism, one made by Comte himself and the other two by his commentators, to keep our perspective in place:

Positivism consists essentially of a Philosophy and a Polity. These can never be dissevered; the former being the basis and latter the end of one comprehensive system, in which our intellectual faculties and our social

sympathies are brought into correlation with each other (Comte).

Comte coined this concept [i.e., positivism] to designate a particular kind of philosophy that plays the role of classifying and organising the system of the sciences and eventually the 'spiritual' order of the social system, and thereby the entire hierarchy of the social and industrial economy (Gane).

[Comte's] positivism was fashioned both as a scientific systematisation of science and as humanistically demystified religion (Wernick).

Positivism includes positive philosophy and positive polity or, which is the same thing, positive science and positive religion with the former being the basis, and latter the end or the goal. They will be discussed below seriatim.

2.2.3.1 Positive philosophy : Positivism in its first phase

Three aspects or features of positivism in its first phase are: [a] *Positivism as a theory and stage of history* [b] *Positivism as a theory of knowledge* and [c] *Positivism as a differential theory of science*. The last subsection will also touch on the queen of the sciences, that is, sociology, which is the climax or culmination of positive philosophy. Peter Halfpenny captures the above three aspects of positivism slightly differently:

As propounded in the *Cours [Course in positive philosophy]*, Comte's positive philosophy has three parts...[a] Positivism, is a theory of historical development in which improvements in knowledge are both the motor of historical progress and the source of social stability. [b] Positivism is a theory of knowledge, according to which the only kind of sound knowledge available to mankind is that of science, grounded in observation. [c] Positivism is a unity of science thesis, according to which all sciences can be integrated into a single natural system.

2.2.3.1.1 Positivism as a theory and stage of history.

Positivism must needs be understood, first of all, in relation to Comte's famous three-state law, where it emerges both as a theory and stage of history. Since the law has been discussed at length in the previous lesson, it will receive only the briefest treatment here. Let's refresh our memory by going back to Comte's formulation of the law and the exegetical comment on it by Warren Schmaus: the human mind, by its nature, successively employs in each one of its researches three methods of philosophizing, of which the character is essentially different and even radically opposed: at first [i] the theological method, then [ii] the metaphysical method, and finally [iii] the positive method (Comte).

Comte characterizes each of these "methods of philosophizing" in terms of the explanatory goals man sets for himself in each state. Etymologically speaking, to use a method is to follow a path. As we choose our roads according

to our destination, so, too, are the paths taken by philosophers chosen in accordance with their goals. Comte assumes that the basic goal of all philosophers is the explanation of natural phenomena. Philosophers differ in their goals to the extent to which they differ in what they will accept as an explanation (Schmaus).

Human intelligence moves from theology to metaphysics before reaching its zenith in positive science or positivism. What do the three states signify? They are three distinct and opposed modes of knowledge or ways of understanding and explaining the world.

Theology and metaphysics both seek hidden causes or essences of phenomena in their quest for absolute knowledge. In contrast, positivism seeks relative knowledge of the invariable laws that govern the phenomenal world. Theology and metaphysics look above, behind or beyond phenomena and posit supernatural entities or abstract forces as causal agents. Positive science, on the other hand, is oriented to grasping the relations of similitude and succession that subsist between facts of observation. The real opposition, however, remains between theology and science, with metaphysics serving as a mediation or transition between the two states.

Besides intellectual knowledge, other social segments - e.g., morals and politics - too follow the three-state law. But different societies and different segments within societies progress towards positivity at different velocities. In consequence, the different modes of thought, represented by theology, metaphysics, and science or positivism, coexist in all societies and at all times, although a particular mode of thought may predominate in any given context.

It is important to realise that positivism emerges in history and makes sense only in relation to theology and metaphysics. 'An idea', Comte said, 'cannot be properly understood except through its history.' Positivism is, for Comte, the highest stage in human evolution, but the ground for it was prepared by the two earlier stages. Robert Scharff has something interesting to say on this:

Comte does not - indeed could not - employ his three stage law to promote the idea that scientific minds should think of the Western tradition's theological and metaphysical periods as times of mere superstition and intellectual nonsense. In his historically minded views, science is simply the last and finally successful expression of humanity's long struggle to explain and control nature; hence what theology and metaphysics tried to do, even the ways in which they tried to do it, remain perfectly intelligible.

The purpose of Comte's historically minded defense of science, then is, is to encourage in current philosophers a sense of their kinship with, not just

superiority to, prescientific practice. At every stage, what we have most deeply wanted is "a conceptual system concerning the totality of phenomena" that permits us to know our surroundings well enough to order our lives effectively. At every stage, this goal is pursued by whatever method seems maximally surpassing of earlier ones. What science finally does is to fulfil our deepest aim by transforming the ineffective methods of theology and metaphysics. We human beings are thus not fundamentally either theological or metaphysical, but neither are we fundamentally scientific. At bottom we are practical...

Positive science has the same practical goal as theology and metaphysics, namely, to forge an all-encompassing conceptual system and, with its help, explain, predict and control phenomena. Only, the methods of science are superior to others. Positivism is both a stage in human history and the theoretical vantage point from which to view and organise that history.

2.2.3.1.2 Positivism as a theory of knowledge

The basic points about positivism as a theory of knowledge have, in fact, already been stated above; there is a need, however, to spell them out. According to Comte, positivist science seeks [a] *useful and relative knowledge* of the [b] *invariable laws of phenomena* [c] by means of *reasoning and observation* in order thereby [d] to gain *prevision and control* of the world. In Andrew Wernick's words:

For [Comte] science is an *observationally based cognitive activity* which links a human subject, suitably purged of illusory preconceptions, and a natural object, commonsensically regarded as being 'out there', in the systematically conducted pursuit of *useful knowledge*. For [him] that knowledge takes the form of the *discovery and interconnecting of laws* by which an invariant order of nature makes its ineluctable presence felt. *Mastering the human environment* depends in fact, on recognising and utilising those laws, whose *predictive power* is at once the sign of their scientificity and of their *utility* as the basis for rational action. On such an account, what characterises scientific knowledge is that it is at once phenomenalist, nomothetic [generalising], predictive and instrumental... (our emphasis).

It is time to elaborate on the four aspects of Comte's theory of knowledge parenthesised above.

2.2.3.1.2.1 Relative and useful knowledge

In contrast with theology and metaphysics, the knowledge that positive science seeks is not absolute but relative - 'relative to the limited standpoint of the human subject', as Wernick puts it. Human subject is limited both by nature and society or, in Comte's word, by 'our organisation and situation'. 'This is evidently a multiple relativity,' remarks Wernick, 'the truth-for-ourselves that takes into account the biological and sociological nature of the human mind,

its given stage of development, and the relation of the human species to the terrestrial world and beyond on which it depends.' As a consequence, he continues, 'while scientific procedures are designed to engender knowledge about objective reality, that reality could not be known or understood in its essence, but only from without, in the form of its phenomenal appearance.'

Science consists of successive approximations to truth. That of course does not imply that the relatively true knowledge is useless. 'Though limited,' writes Fletcher, 'it nonetheless provides the only reliable basis for effective action in the world and in society, in the pursuit of all our ends.'

For Comte, the touchstone of effective knowledge is practical applicability. Sometimes, however, the instrumental or utilitarian conception of scientific knowledge gets over-stretched in Comte leading him 'to dismiss extensive domains of already existing or emerging knowledge as fundamentally useless or metaphysical.' Kolakowski points out: 'In this spirit he disposed of the theory of probability, astrophysics, cosmogonies extending farther than the solar system, investigations into the structure of matter, the theory of evolution, and even study of the origin of societies.'

Let us sum up by reiterating Comte's view that 'positive' knowledge is real, useful, certain, precise, constructive *and* relative at one and the same time.

2.2.3.1.2.2 Invariable laws of phenomena

Positivism does not ask why things happen as they do; it does not seek to explain phenomena in terms of causes or essences, supernatural or metaphysical; and it declines to accept feeling and imagination or ratiocination as appropriate methods of cognitive inquiry. Instead, it asks how phenomena arise and what course they take and seeks to discover the invariable laws that govern phenomena - the relations of succession (diachrony) and similitude (synchrony) that exist between facts - by using reasoning and observation in tandem.

Positivism rejects 'why' and even 'what' questions not because they are meaningless, but because they are unanswerable. According to Comte, the quest for essences or causes above, behind or beyond phenomena is futile. Positive science restricts itself to observing phenomena and discovering their laws. Larry Laudan explains the nature of these laws:

The discovery of laws and theories, therefore, is the *raison d'etre* of science; once we know what they are we can simultaneously generate prediction and dispense with all but a few observations. Hence [as Comte says], science really consists in laws of phenomena. [I]t is natural to ask what sorts of laws Comte had in mind. Basically Comte's answer to the question is the same as Hume's. All laws express regularities of coexistence or regularities of succession. What coexist or succeed are the phenomena. But laws express

not mere regularities, but rather invariable and universal regularities between phenomena.

Laws express regularities, which are both universal and invariable. Comte's invariable laws are like J.S. Mill's well-known principle of the uniformity of nature that science presupposes. But this presupposition is not *a priori*, but based on empirical observation.

2.2.3.1.2.3 Observation and reasoning

Comte is famous for the following slogan: 'There can be no real knowledge except that which rests on observed facts.' Robert Scharff comments: 'For Comte, the positive stage begins when the nominalistic and anarchic implications of metaphysics push the mind toward subordinating itself to observation.'

Thus, it is empirical observation, among other things, that distinguishes positivism from both theology and metaphysical ontology. But observation does not become fruitful, positive or scientific until it is guided by some law, theory or hypothesis. In Comte, theory and observation, reason and sense experience, deduction and induction go hand in hand; one is never severed from the other. 'Between reasoning and observation,' says Comte, 'there is no absolute separation.'

If, on the one hand, every positive theory must be based on observations, it is equally clear, on the other hand, that in order to make an observation, our mind requires some theory. If, in contemplating the phenomena, if we did not connect them to some principles, it would not only be impossible to combine these isolated observations and consequently impossible to draw anything useful from them, but we would even be altogether incapable of retaining them; and for the most part we could not even perceive them.

[scientists] only employ observations that are attached, at least hypothetically, to some law; it is this connection that constitutes the principal difference between the observations of scientists and those of the common man. [Quotes from Comte's *Course in positive philosophy*, vol 1 and vol 4.]

In Comte's view, there are in science 'four modes of the art of observation', namely, observation proper, experimentation, comparison, and the historical method:

The art of observation is composed, in general, of three different operations: (1) observation, strictly speaking, that is the direct examination of phenomena naturally presented to us; (2) experiment, or the consideration of the phenomenon more or less modified by artificial circumstances which we expressly create in order to explore it more perfectly; (3) comparison, or a gradual consideration of a series of analogous cases in which the phenomenon is further and further simplified.

The historical method, not mentioned above, is but a variety of comparative method and is used mainly in sociology to compare phenomena across time. Each of the four methods of observation is more appropriate to some sciences than others. 'Thus, an astronomer can only observe; the physicist can both observe and experiment; but cannot compare; whereas the biologist and social physicist (sociologist) rely on comparison as well as observation and experimentation.' This is Larry Laudan. And he continues: 'But for all his stress on various methods of observation, Comte is convinced that science is designed ultimately to dispense with observations almost entirely. Indeed, once we know the laws that govern the universe, and a few appropriate initial conditions, science can move from the laboratory to the armchair, from the tedious method of observation and fact-collecting to the more rapid method of ratiocination and calculation.'

2.2.3.1.2.4 Prevision (or prediction) and control

The aim of positive or scientific knowledge is prevision or prediction. 'From science comes prevision; from prevision comes action,' declares Comte in *Positive philosophy*. Prevision or predictive power is the 'unfailing test which distinguishes real science from vain erudition.' In short, prevision serves to demarcate science from both non-science (theology and metaphysics) and bad science (mere accumulation of disconnected facts).

Prediction, which is a leap not from the present to future but from the known to the unknown, is a necessary consequence of the discovery of invariable laws or constant relations between phenomena. In fact, the establishment of real connections between facts is the essence and the basis of both *prediction* and *explanation* :

The truth is that whether the aim is to explain or to foresee, in either case it is the establishment of a connection. Every real connection, whether statical or dynamical, discovered between any two phenomena enables us both to explain them and to foresee them, each by the means of other. For prevision, in the scientific sense of the word, is not confined to the future; it may evidently be used also of the present and even the past. It consists in the knowledge of a fact indirectly, by virtue of its relations with other facts already known, without needing to explore it directly...

Laudan has clarified that although prediction and explanation are *identical in logical structure*, there is an *epistemic difference* between the two: 'The principal difference between explanation and prediction is this: In an explanation, initial conditions and the result are known and it is a matter of providing the correct law which links the two. In making a prediction, however, we know certain conditions and certain laws, but are uncertain about some event connected to them. When we already know the [result] to be true, we have an explanation; when we do not, we are making a prediction.'

From science comes prevision; from prevision comes action. To the extent prevision becomes the basis of actions and policies in dealing with human environment, science gives us control over the world. However, there is a limit beyond which the world cannot be modified by science and human effort. According to Wernick, the third rule of Comte's 'first philosophy', sets this limit: 'All modifications of the universal order are limited to the degree of intensity of the phenomena, their arrangement not admitting of alteration.'

2.2.3.1.3 Positivism as a differential theory of science

Johan Heilbron has argued that Comte's theory of knowledge, described above, is not very original, 'whereas his theory of the sciences represents an important innovation of great historical significance'. We need to quote Heilbron in full to learn about Comte's theory of science as well as Heilbron's own standpoint in this regard:

It is useful in this connection to distinguish [Comte's] theory of knowledge from his theory of the sciences... Broadly speaking, his theory of knowledge was concerned with the common characteristics of knowledge: the progressive break with theology and metaphysics and the development towards positive forms of cognition, involving the notions of "laws" and "explanation". The theory of the sciences, on the other hand, was concerned with the specific properties of the various sciences. What I would like to suggest here is that the theory of knowledge was not particularly original, whereas his theory of sciences represents an important innovation of great historical significance...

Although his conception of positive knowledge was not very original, one might say that Comte was one of the very first to elaborate a historical and differential theory of science. Comte, in effect, broke with the idea that science could be founded on some nonhistorical, logical or universal principle. He accordingly rejected all the existing theories. Comte broke with the presupposition as the result of a two-fold operation. First, Comte historized the question: scientific knowledge was a historical process. Concepts and theories change; any statement about science should therefore be a statement of historical processes... More original was the second operation, whereby Comte differentiated the sciences according to the specific characteristics of their object. He opposed monist and reductionist theories of science and replaced them with a differential theory. What science was did not only depend on phases and stages, but also on the specific properties of the scientific object in question. It was impossible to reduce the different sciences to one basic type.

Comte's historical and differential theory of science is summed up in his *encyclopaedic formula* or *law*, which sets up a hierarchy of six fundamental sciences, namely, astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and

sociology in order of increasing complexity and decreasing generality. Each of these sciences has a distinct object of study and follows a mode of observation best suited to its specific needs. Out of the four modes of observation delineated above, for example, astronomy relies on direct observation, physics chiefly on experiment, biology on comparison and sociology among others on the historical method. Although every succeeding science depends upon those preceding it, it can never be reduced to any and all of them. Finally, all sciences pass through the stages of theologism and metaphysics and become positive over time, but at different rates. 'The lower sciences develop first: a form of inquiry progresses to the positive stage at a rate that is greater the less complex it is, the less its dependence on other sciences, and the greater its distance from human affairs,' writes Peter Halfpenny.

Sciences are historical insofar as they evolve and change over time and they are differential to the extent each of them has a distinct object of study and a methodology appropriate to it. Comte distinguished between *fundamental sciences* and *concrete sciences*, on one side, and between *analytical sciences* and *synthetic sciences*, on the other. As to the first distinction, N.S. Timashaeff writes: 'Sciences, Comte asserted...were either theoretical or practical (applied). The theoretical could be further divided into descriptive (concrete) and abstract, the first dealing with concrete phenomena, and second striving for the discovery of laws of nature governing these phenomena, determining their coexistence and succession.'

The six sciences, from mathematics to sociology, arranged in a hierarchy by Comte are *fundamental*, that is, theoretical and abstract. Their number is not fixed for all time, says Comte, and in fact he himself added the science of morals to his list later on. The first four sciences are *analytical*, while biology and sociology are *synthetic* in the sense that both focus on 'the whole' and not on the parts of the object of their study. Explains R. Fletcher: 'In Biology, however, - in studying the living organism; in sociology - in studying systems of institutions; the consensus of facts immediately required that 'the whole' should be the focal concept of study, since the parts could only be properly investigated and understood in terms of their interdependence in the whole system.'

Sociology marks the completion of positive philosophy centred on the three-state law of human progress. Positive sociology and positive philosophy were formed simultaneously and hoped to furnish the necessary *intellectual* basis for social reconstruction and thereby overcome the 'western crisis':

The positive spirit therefore must be the one determining principle of that great intellectual communion upon which all true human association must rest, though it has to be coupled with two other fundamental conditions - a sufficient conformity of feeling, and some convergence of interests.

...the positive philosophy alone is capable of gradually realizing the noble project of universal association which Catholicism prematurely tried to build up in the Middle Ages. That attempt failed because the catholic philosophy...had insufficient logical coherence to enable it to accomplish this social aim (Comte in *Discourse on positive spirit*).

The strategy...is to produce out of the scientific tradition and particularly the new arrival sociology, a new ethics. The new ethics will be organised by a new 'spiritual power' of educators and counsellors, who now, [Comte] announces dramatically, will form an alliance with the newly emerging proletariat (Gane).

Such is Comte's positivism in the first phase, the phase of positive philosophy, comprising a theory of history, a theory of knowledge, and a theory of science. In this phase, 'a first abstract level of positivisation', as Gane puts it, 'it is intellect and objectivity that play the main. In the second it is feeling and subjectivity.'

Check Your Progress 2

Notes : i. Use space below for your answers.

ii. Compare your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.

1. What are the three major aspects of positivism in the first phase?

2. What is meant by the 'invariable laws of phenomena'?

3. Explain the meaning of 'historical and differential theory of science'
-
-

2.2.3.2 Positive polity: Positivism in the second phase

Comte had reposed his faith in positive philosophy and positive sociology, or intellect and objectivity, as a way out of the social crisis that afflicted the West. He had believed that once positive science triumphed, moral consensus would be restored to the disoriented European society as if automatically. Then, why did he begin to find science, reason and intellect inadequate? Mike Gane explains what impelled Comte to reconsider some of his premises and undertake an auto-critique:

From the mid-1840s, then, Comte began an auto-critique. His previous positions, he reflected, did not sufficiently mark itself off from a major weakness of modernity, the revolt of reason against emotions leading to the overdevelopment of reason against the heart. If the emotions were important what had been the consequences of omitting them from his system? What had been the consequences of concentrating too much on the role of the intellect in the law of the three states? He made new and important connections between religion, love and the emotions, and the relations more generally concerning the importance of women in social evolution.

... having performed the operation of making the final science appear at its appointed time, sociology itself seemed incapable of provoking the instant rallying point for a new politics and a new political order he anticipated: reason, intellect, was not enough.

In short, during the second phase of positivism, the phase of positive polity, Comte [i] begins to appreciate the role of feeling and of love in human life, [ii] understands that religion is indispensable as a symbol and instrument of social solidarity, [iii] grasps the importance of women in social evolution and thus [iv] realises the radical limitations of science and intellect. In the first phase of positivism, intellect and objectivity play the main role; in the second, it is feeling and subjectivity.

With the subjective turn, Comte increasingly emphasises coordination between intellect, feeling and action or *head*, *heart* and *hands* in human life and thought. He realises that the positive polity of his dreams would require *science* as well as a new *religion of humanity* and an *ethics of altruism* to sustain itself. And

in line with the triadic logic, he is also able to see that scientific or *spiritual elite* (the sociologists), *women* and the *proletariat* would form the three complementary pillars of his ideal sociocracy.

It needs to be stressed that Comte never ever abandoned his faith in positive philosophy or positive science; only, he wanted to complement it by positive religion and positive ethics. Comte's religion of humanity is a wholly secular or non-theistic religion, a demonstrable faith as he called it, without reference to gods, supernatural entities or occult powers of any kind. It substitutes the love of Humanity (the Great Being) for the love of God (the Supreme Being). Similarly, the ethics of altruism, which prioritises duties over rights, does not transgress science or the religion of humanity.

Comte's positive philosophy and positive polity - or science, religion and ethics - together constitute and define his complete positivism. As Comte said: 'Positivism consists essentially of a Philosophy and a Polity. These can never be dissevered; the former being the basis and latter the end of one comprehensive system, in which our intellectual faculties and our social sympathies are brought into correlation with each other.'

Check Your Progress 3

Notes : i. Use space below for your answers.

ii. Compare your answers with those given at the end of this lesson.

1. What is the main point of difference between the first and the second phase of positivism?

2. What is 'religion of humanity?'

2.3 Let Us Sum up

The present lesson has described Comte's positivism including his

positive philosophy and positive polity. The limitation of space has allowed only the shortest possible treatment of positivism in its second phase, that of positive polity. Again, we have not considered whether the two phases of Comte's positivism are continuous or discontinuous. A group of scholars now believe that 'the so-called second phase of his thought, in which he elaborated his 'religion of humanity', is a natural development from the earlier, its crowning achievement rather than any sort of falling off' (Kolakowski). On the other hand, Gane has argued that 'if there is continuity there is also a dramatic displacement' between the two phases.

Comte's positivism has been assessed differently by different scholars. Karl Marx, for example, dismissed it as 'shitty', while Nietzsche hailed Comte as 'a great honest Frenchman beside whom, as embracer and conqueror of the strict sciences, the German and the English of this [i.e.19th] century can place no rival.' In sociology, Durkheim was heavily influenced by him. Durkheim's sociologism - a synthesis of positivism and social realism - as many of his other ideas were directly derived from Comte. E.E. Evans-Pritchard testifies:

It is customary, and right, for us to pay tribute to Durkheim but there is little of methodological or theoretical significance in his writings that we do not find in Comte if we are earnest and persevering enough to look for it; and I would go so far as to say, though he was not a person of Durkheim's stature, that there is nothing in Radcliffe-Brown's theoretical formulations of a century later that is not clearly and cogently enunciated by Comte.

Comte's positivism has been charged with *dualism* or the dissociation of facts and values in epistemology and [ii] *elitism* or the subordination of the masses to spiritual and temporal elite in positive polity. It is fair to conclude that the problems of dualism and elitism persist in Comte despite his later attempts to connect science with religion and ethics or recognise the importance of women and the proletariat in industrial society.

2.4 Key Words

Atheism : Atheism, the belief that God does not exist, is metaphysics - an instance of *metaphysical negation* of theology - and hence offers only an imperfect emancipation. It falls far short of positivism, according to Comte.

Dualism : For Comte, mind (values) and the world (facts) are constituted independently of each other. This is dualism, which is contested, e.g., by Marxism, phenomenology and semiology. The relationship between science and morality or facts and values is extrinsic and not intrinsic in Comte.

Elitism : The masses are subject to the hegemony and domination of the temporal elite (industrialists, bankers, etc.) and the spiritual elite (positivist

philosophers, sociologists) in Comte's utopian positive polity. This hierarchical vision, derived from Saint-Simon, is what we have called elitism.

Empiricism : The doctrine that sensory experience/observation leads directly to knowledge without the mediation of theory or reason. Comtean positivism, on the other hand, believes in the dialectic of theory and observation or deduction and induction; there can be no observation without theory and no theory without observation.

Ethics of altruism : Altruism is a term coined by Comte. To live for others is altruism. It is the direct opposite of egoism implying self-centredness or selfishness. Comte realised in the later part of his career that the positive society needs the ethics of altruism as much as it needs science and industry.

Fetishism : It's the first stage in man's intellectual journey, where 'man conceives of all external bodies as animated by a life analogous to his own.' In the fetishistic sub-state of theology, there are no gods and no priests either. Human mind does not seek explanation of natural phenomena in terms of causes, but rather approaches them with feeling. Comte first thought that in fetishism 'the religious spirit is most directly opposed to the scientific'. But his view changed between 1840 and 1853 and he came to think that 'of the different forms of the fictitious synthesis [i.e. theology], fetishism is logically and scientifically the best'. 'Indeed, between fetishism and positivism he discovers a radical unity. The first is spontaneous positivism and the second is systematic,' writes Gane.

Historical and differential theory of science : According to Heilbron, the originality of Comte lies chiefly in his *historical and differential theory of science*, which forms a major aspect of Comte's positive philosophy. Sciences are historical, holds Comte, insofar as they evolve and change over time and they are differential to the extent each of them has a distinct object of study and a methodology appropriate to it.

Materialism : For Comte materialism means 'reducing' the facts of a higher-order science to the facts of a lower-order science, a strategy inconsistent with Comte's differential theory of science and hence incompatible with positivism.

Metaphysical state : The state of metaphysics or metaphysical ontology is the state of transition between theology and positivism. In this state, human mind seeks *causal explanation* of phenomena in terms of abstract forces. Ratiocination or speculative thought is the dominant intellectual orientation of this era. Socially, the metaphysical stage is marked by defensive militarism, and legalism.

Positive state : The final stage of man's intellectual journey, when man abandons the quest for causal explanation in terms of supernatural beings or abstract forces and seeks to discover the invariable laws governing phenomena

through observation and reasoning. It is also known as the *scientific state* or the state of *positivity*.

Positivism : This is how Mike Gane has glossed this concept: 'Comte coined this concept [i.e., positivism] to designate a particular kind of philosophy that plays the role of classifying and organising the system of the sciences and eventually the 'spiritual' order of the social system, and thereby the entire hierarchy of the social and industrial economy.

Positivism : Two phases : Comte's work passed through two phases or levels of positivisation. In the first phase, that of positive philosophy, Comte employed the *objective method* to 'complete and coordinate the system of sciences'; in the second phase of positive polity, he uses the *subjective method* to 'complete the system of ethics and found a new Religion of Humanity'. In the first phase, intellect, reason or science is all in all for Comte; in the second, he realises the inadequacy of positivist reason and science and lays emphasis on the role of feeling in human life. Comte realised that positivism is perfected when it skilfully combines objective with subjective method, intellect with feeling and science with the religion of humanity and the ethics of altruism.

Relations of succession and similitude : Relations between facts across time are relations of succession; relations that subsist between facts at a given point of time are relations of similitude. The word similitude is also translated as 'coexistence', 'similarity' or 'resemblance'. Comte divides his sociology into 'social statics' and 'social dynamics'; the former studies order or the relations of coexistence, while the latter studies progress or the relations of succession.

Relative knowledge : The knowledge that positive science seeks is not absolute but relative - 'relative to the limited standpoint of the human subject'. Human subject is limited both by nature and society and, therefore, can never hope to attain absolute truth or knowledge.

Religion of humanity : The term 'religion' changed meaning in Comte's work. Prior to the phase of *Positive polity*, religion had for Comte the same meaning as theology. Later, religion was detached from theology and came 'to mean the activity of creating and recreating social and intellectual unity in society through the impulses of sympathy' (Gane). The religion of humanity is the religion of the positive era, which has Humanity or 'Great Being' (and not God or Supreme Being) as its object of worship. Humanity is conceived, according to Gane, 'as the totality of the highest representatives of humankind'.

Theological state : Also labelled as the fictive, fictional or fictitious state, the theological state is the starting point of the social series represented by the three-state law. It is divided into three sub-states: fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. In the state of theology or theologism, human mind explains phenomena in terms of supernatural causes; feeling and imagination take

precedence over reasoning and and observation; and the social order is dominated by militarism.

2.5 Model Answers to Check Your Progress

Check your progress 1

1. A. Stephen Zeliak believes that the words 'positive science' were first uttered by Madame de Staël in the 18th century. B. According to Wernick, the six elements are: realism, usefulness, certainty, precision, constructiveness and relativity.
2. Because atheism is negative metaphysics - the metaphysical negation of theology. It falls far short of positivism.
3. Francis Bacon, Galileo and Descartes.

Check your progress 2

1. The three major aspects of positivism in its first phase are: [a] Positivism as a theory and stage of history [b] Positivism as a theory of knowledge and [c] Positivism as a differential theory of science.
2. The constant relations or regularities that subsist between phenomena are the invariable laws.
3. According to Heilbron, Comte's theory of science is historical and differential. Sciences are historical, holds Comte, insofar as they evolve and change over time and they are differential to the extent each of them has a distinct object of study and a methodology appropriate to it.

Check your progress 3

1. In the first phase of positivism, intellect and objectivity play the main role; in the second, it is feeling and subjectivity.
2. The religion of humanity is the religion of the positive era, which has Humanity or 'Great Being' (and not God or Supreme Being) as its object of worship. Humanity is conceived, according to Gane, 'as the totality of the highest representatives of humankind'.

2.6 Further Readings

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Note : Comte has been cited mainly from secondary sources. Some of his works are available online. The abridged version of Comte's *Course in positive philosophy* prepared by Harriet Martineau, for example, is available on the Web as also his *A general view of positivism*. The latter has been used and cited in the lesson.

Evolutionary Theory of Herbert Spencer

Structure :

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Definition of Evolution
- 3.3 Why Evolutionary Theories?
- 3.4 Evolutionary Theory of Herbert Spencer
- 3.5 Significant Features of Spencer's Theory of Evolution
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 Key Words/Concepts
- 3.8 Exercise Questions
- 3.9 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES :

The main objectives of this lesson are that after it is thoroughly read, the student shall be able to :

- * understand what is meant by evolution.
- * understand how evolutionary theories are applied in society.
- * know what is Spencer's Theory of Evolution.
- * understand how social change and development in society is explained by Spencer.
- * understand the influence of ideas from Physics and Biology on Spencer's thought.
- * critically examine the strength and weakness of Spencer's evolutionary theory.

3.1 INTRODUCTION :

Evolutionary theories have been popular forms of theorization in the early

phases of development of Sociology. August Comte proposed the idea that societies progressed through different stages in the process of development starting from the Theological, to Metaphysical and finally culminating into the Positive Stage. Starting from Comte himself, the evolutionist theories in Sociology became most popular during 19th Century owing to various historical and intellectual reasons. This was the time when Herbert Spencer entered the scene and made his mark as one of the leading social evolutionists. However, by the beginning of 20th Century the evolutionist theories already started losing their charm and experienced a decline afterwards. Nevertheless, many of the ideas developed by the evolutionist theorists still find resonance in many modern ideas. It, therefore, helps us as sociologists to familiarize ourselves with those theories which had an important role in establishing the foundations of Sociology at one time. The chapter will start with describing the concept of evolution and then proceed to contextualize Spencer's work before explaining his theory of evolution.

3.2 DEFINITION OF EVOLUTION :

The term evolution is derived from the word evolve, which in turn is derived from the combination of prefix 'e' to the Latin word *volvere*. In Latin *volvere* means to roll out. When combined with prefix 'e' in English which stands for 'out' or 'away' the word formed by this combination is 'evolve' and it literally means 'to unfold, open out or expand' or 'to develop'. The word 'evolution' hence means the process of unfolding, opening up or of rolling out. Therefore, if a particular thing is 'evolving' or is undergoing the process of 'evolution' it is bringing out more details about itself which were hitherto unseen, undisclosed and unrealized. In a way, when something undergoes the process of evolution, it displays those properties about itself which were earlier not associated with it but which emerge only during the process of its unfolding or evolving and result in changing its character.

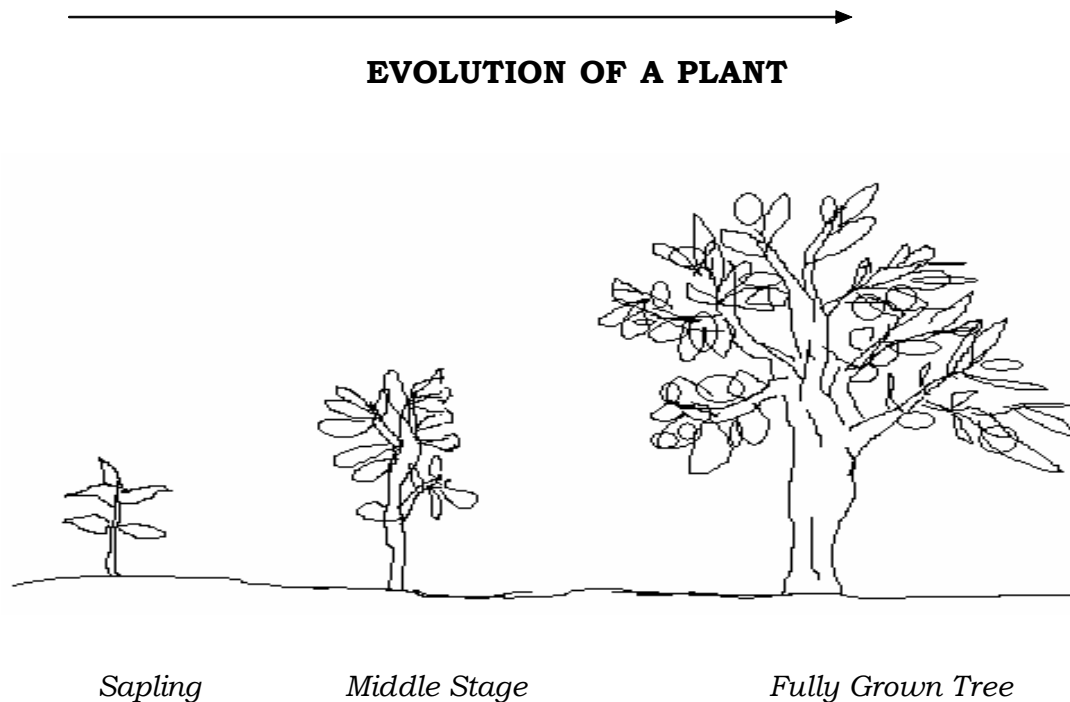
Hence, we can look at evolution as a process through which a particular thing undergoes transformation. However, it is not any kind of transformation that evolution stands for. The transformation that it refers to has two important characteristics. Firstly, this transformation or change is driven from within the object that evolves. Secondly, this change allows the object to harness those potentialities of itself which will enable it to strengthen and improve itself. Hence, it is a process of change that involves development, growth and progress.

When we look around ourselves we find certain things which never change. For example non-living things like rock, chair, table etc. If at all these things change their shape or appearance it is only because of forces acting upon them from outside, e.g., a rock gets weathered by wind, can get smaller by being broken with the help of a hammer, or can be shaped beautifully by a

sculptor. Similarly, a chair or table cannot change itself on its own but need to be worked upon by forces existing outside it. So the changes, if at all brought about in such material objects, it is only because of external forces. Moreover every change brought about in objects mentioned above may not end up in making these things grow or develop as seen in the case of a stone above which weathers away and becomes smaller and weaker.

On the other hand when we look at living objects around us we are able to realize how these objects change and transform themselves with the passage of time and also that they are driven through forces inherent in them making them more strong and mature as they change. It is this type of change which we call evolution. The process of change in evolution is found to be gradual and peaceful.

A plant that grows into a tree would be a good example here to show the process of evolution (see the diagram below). With the passage of time a small sapling of plant grows into a fully grown tree passing through different stage of development.



Direction of growth, development or evolution

Similar is the case with human beings who grow into an adult man or a woman from a small child. This type of growth and development is considered evolution.

Evolution, therefore, is a process of continuous change from a lower, simpler, or worse to a higher, more complex or better state. It is a process of growth and development. It is understood as a process of change in a particular direction. The term evolution has often been applied by thinkers and philosophers to understand and explain the nature of phenomena observed by them. As one can see from the definition it was primarily concerned with the development and growth of a living organism but the concept later on proved useful to various thinkers in explaining non-biological phenomena as well. Social scientists have successfully applied the concept to various advances in society, polity and economy that are gradual and peaceful. Sociologists have tried to make sense of various social phenomena involving social and cultural change as a process of evolution.

Evolutionary theories are primarily explanations about the origin, development and diversity of biological species. When applied in the field of Sociology to explain social phenomena and social change, the evolutionary theory usually combines two ideas; first, that evolutionary advancement involves the development of complex forms of social organization from simple ones, via the increasing differentiation of social structure and specialization of function. Second, that these structural changes involve a parallel process of continuing moral, intellectual and aesthetic development.

3.3 WHY EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES?

There was a particular phase in the history of western world in which the social and intellectual climate was diffused with the ideas of evolutionism. Most noticeable contribution in popularizing the evolutionist perspective was made by Darwin. In 1859, Charles Darwin wrote a book *The Origin of Species* which brought forth the idea of evolution of human species from simple, crude apes to civilized human beings. Before this study, which got widely recognized because of its scientific method, people in the western world believed human race to be a privileged species amongst all living organisms because God Himself created human species like that. Christianity believed in an anthropocentric world view where Man was the center of creation and superior in all aspects from other living species. Contrary to this belief Darwin explained the journey of mankind from apes to human beings using the concepts of 'natural selection' and 'survival of the fittest' highlighting therefore that there was nothing divine in the origin of mankind and it was only out of our ability to adapt to the changing external and internal conditions that we could evolve into what we are today.

His ideas were welcomed and well received in the academic circles and applied by some in social sciences as well. However, it is notable here, that some of the seminal ideas which caught fancy of the people at that time had already been coincidentally applied in understanding social phenomena by Herbert Spencer almost seven years before Darwin's book got published. Spencer had pointed out that he had already developed his views along these lines in the *Westminster Review* way back in 1852 itself. Spencer had asserted through the idea of 'survival of the fittest' that the conquest of one people over another has been the conquest of the social order over the anti social, the more readapted over the less adapted. These idea of Spencer found many takers, especially in America owing to its emphasis on non-interference of governments in the processes of change in society. The idea fitted well with Adam Smith's doctrine of *laissez-faire*.

Besides Spencer, other leading theorists who tried to explain social phenomena with the help of evolutionist principles were Morgan, Hobhouse, Tylor and Ward. The emergence of Britain and the West as colonial powers made many believe in their ascendancy at international level as a sign of their superiority and adaptability. Their theories saw the newly industrialized countries of Western Europe in the 19th century like Britain, France and Germany, as representing the most advanced stage in the process of evolution and development of human societies. Many non-industrial, simple hunting and gathering societies, peasant societies were seen by them as living examples of earlier stages of human development which the industrialized societies had experienced long back when they were not yet developed. Thus when they compared themselves with the non-industrialized societies they believed themselves to be intellectually, culturally, militarily and socially more advanced and to them. Such theories suited the interests of the rulers who thought evolutionism standing by their side while explaining their supremacy over the others and thus legitimizing their social and political position.

REVISION TEST-1

- 1) What is evolution?

- 2) Name any two evolutionist thinkers besides Spencer?
-
-

- 3) Do evolutionary theories help us in understanding any aspect of society?

3.4 EVOLUTIONARY THEORY OF HERBERT SPENCER :

What is directly visible to us is not an ordered world but a multitude of phenomena happening around us in a random manner. However, if we observe our surroundings more carefully, we discern systematic arrangement of events into a meaningful process. We find order and regularity in our material and social world. According to him, if we look around if we look around carefully we find that the world exists around us not in a haphazard collection of events and thing. Everything that we observe or experience exists in some order and regularity. The reality, therefore, is not directly observable at the surface but exists at a much deeper level. What we observe at the surface is the mere manifestation of that deeper reality. This reality which determines the nature and shape of all observable phenomena in our social world is called 'fundamental reality' by Spencer. He believed that everything was either rooted in this 'fundamental reality', or proceeded out of it or were merely changing forms and manifestations of this reality.

The question that comes to our mind is whether this 'fundamental reality' reveals itself to us on its own or not. If not then what stops us from observing it and finally how can we observe it? Spencer believes that this fundamental reality does not reveal itself to us on its own because what we experience in our day to day lives is only a fragment of this underlying truth or 'reality'. This 'reality' gets manifested through multitude of forms and processes and what we experience as individuals is only a limited range of these forms and processes. In order to comprehend 'fundamental reality' we must therefore combine various experiences in a systematic manner to observe in them patterns and regularities through which the true properties of this reality are revealed. Hence, the task of observing this 'fundamental reality' is to be accomplished by social scientists who will be trained in developing systematic and coherent body of knowledge through application of scientific method. The scientific and empirical character of such knowledge will not only provide us accurate and dependable picture of reality but will also help us to make

sense of our discreet experiences in the light of this 'fundamental reality'.

Since different sciences develop knowledge limited to their own fields of study their description of reality remains a partial explanation of the true complete knowledge. Spencer argued that it is only philosophy which does the task of bringing all sciences into relation with each other and provide a 'unified' scheme of knowledge embracing all the dimensions of our experience. Spencer's aim therefore was to develop a unified knowledge with the help of newly developed sciences. His aim was therefore to develop a 'unifying' or 'synthetic' philosophy.

Through this type of philosophy he wanted to highlight that central process which according to him was at the core of all social phenomena, social change, human nature and human society. This central process which according to him was providing movement and shape to all phenomena in reality was nothing but the process of evolution. Spencer's whole scheme of knowledge therefore was based on the premise that 'evolution' was the main concept for understanding the world as a whole and of man's place within it.

All social phenomena, therefore, according to Spencer, are nothing but forms and transformations of the same basic process of evolution. The nature and character of this basic evolutionary process is what we need to understand in order to understand reality. It is manifested in each and every aspect of world in some form or the other. Moreover, all these forms are nothing but sequences and processes of creation, growth, development and dissolution. This basic process of transformation that existed at the heart of nature of all things is what Spencer called 'evolution'.

Spencer's understanding of the process of evolution is derived more from Physics of his time rather than Biology. The fundamental laws of physics which guided his understanding of the process of evolution are as follows:

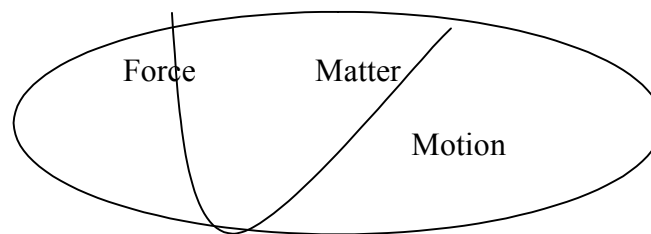
- i. Everything in the world exists in order and regularity. There is uniformity and regularity in relations among different phenomena. A scientist's job is to discern those patterns of regularity and order. World does not exist in chaos but order.
- ii. There is persistence of force in the world. A force which not only exists in all phenomena but also sustains it.
- iii. Matter and energy can neither be created nor destroyed. They can only be transformed from one form into another. Matter and energy are therefore not only indestructible but also they are conserved.
- iv. All things are always in the state of motion. Everything in the world is in the state of continuity.
- v. This indestructible force and matter which is perpetually in motion

has a direction. The direction taken by all phenomena is in the line of least resistance and greatest attraction.

- vi. All phenomena have their own rate and rhythm of movement and of development. Each has its appropriate pattern of transformation which in turn is dependent on nature of organization of its force, elements of matter and patterns of force.

According to Spencer, therefore, all phenomena are a product of combination of three important elements of nature. These are force, matter and motion. Depending upon the manner in which these three elements combine each phenomenon has its own shape and existence. However, when we look beyond the differences at the surface we realize that these combinations of force, matter and motion are governed further by the above mentioned laws of the Physics. Task of a Sociologist is to analyze and clarify those dispositions of force, matter and motion that not only shape a particular phenomenon but also maintain it. It is also important for us to understand that all phenomena are constantly in the state of balance between these three elements. This balance, referred to as a state of equilibrium is not to be seen as static but as always in the process of formation where varying dispositions of three basic elements find some stability for its existence and maintenance. Hence it is in the state of 'moving equilibrium' or a dynamic equilibrium.

THREE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS THAT CONSTITUTE ALL PHENOMENA IN NATURE



On the basis of above proposition he developed his own law of evolution. He says that when we study order or change in any phenomenon, the pattern of transformation is always the same. According to Spencer, all the phenomena of nature followed a definite pattern of change. All processes of change are similar in the sense that they emerge out of the physical stuff of the world, have their own patterns of transformation and change, and, according to these patterns, in due course decline and dissolve.

This movement is always from a condition of simplicity to organized complexity, condition of indefiniteness to definiteness. Condition of relatively

undifferentiated parts to the condition of increasing specialization where there is complex differentiation of both structure and function. In nut shell the movement is from all the conditions of instability, irregularity, incoherence and unpredictability to those set of conditions where there is more of stability, regularity, coherence and predictability.

THE PROCESS OF EVOLUTION

Condition of Existence	towards	Condition of Existence
Simplicity	→	Complexity
Indefiniteness	→	Definiteness
Homogeneity	→	
Heterogeneity	→	
Undifferentiated Parts	→	Complex
Differentiation	→	
Instability	→	Stability
Incoherence	→	Coherence
Irregularity	→	Regularity
Unpredictability	→	
Predictability	→	

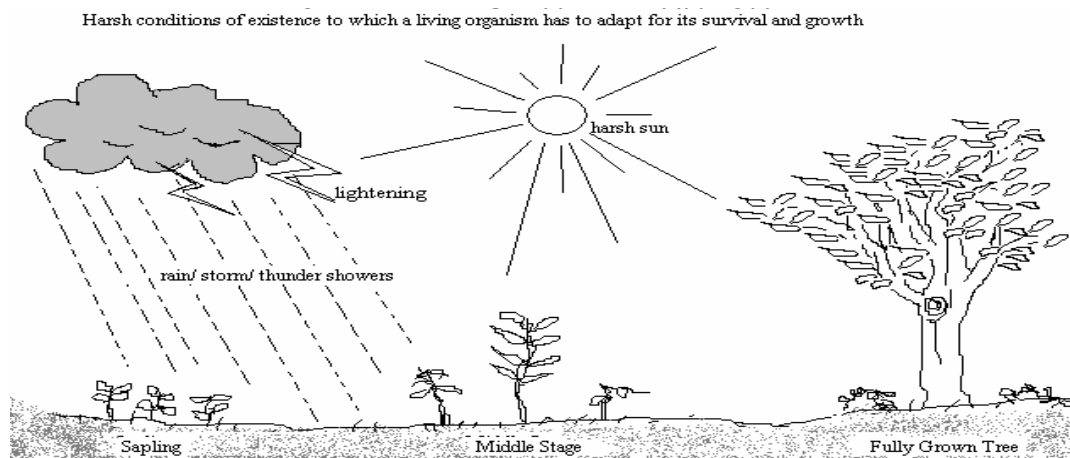
Process of evolution as movement towards more stable and enduring set of conditions of existence as depicted in the diagram above

This change from simpler forms of existence to more complex forms is therefore a natural process of growth and evolution. However, this growth does not take place in vacuum. Each organism grows in a particular environment. When the external environment is conducive for the growth the process of change and transformation for the higher levels of existence will be smooth and comfortable. At the same time, we realize that everything in the world is in a state of flux. Therefore, for any organism to develop, it has not only to grow internally but also ensure that it constantly adjusts and adapts to its external conditions of existence. In fact, one of the first conditions to be fulfilled by an organism before attaining internal growth is to ensure its survival by adjusting to its external conditions. This ability, according to Spencer, is not exhibited equally by all living organisms. It is only the more adaptive and accommodative ones which survive and flourish. This struggle for survival by all living beings in which only the most adaptive one survives is called by Spencer 'survival of the fittest'. The phrase was later on picked by other evolutionary thinkers as well and became popular. The process of

evolution hence enables newer forms of existence to overcome the limitations of the older forms and become more adaptive towards their new environment. To invoke the example of a growing plant that we discussed earlier in the chapter, let us try to understand this concept with the help of the following diagram.

The diagram shows the struggle for survival of the three plants in three different stages. All the plants face similar challenges from their external environment in the form of thunder storm, rain showers, lightening, harsh rays of sun etc. However, of all the three, only one that is able to withstand the harshness of its external environment and adapt accordingly finally survives and evolves into a grown up tree. As the plant grows into a tree its ability to face the extremes of nature improves further because of its shift to higher levels of existence showing more internal stability, coherence, and differentiation.

Thus, the change, according to Spencer, is a fact of life and is nothing but a continuous process of accommodation to conflicting and interacting environmental conditions of existence. All phenomena in nature are what they are in the context of this balancing act of the process of evolution.



Spencer tried to understand and study human societies also under the light of these very principles of evolution. He classified universe into three realms or spheres namely, Inorganic (consisting of non-living matter), Organic (consisting of living matter), and Super-organic (consisting of societies). All three realms of nature, according to him, are governed by the principle of evolution. Spencer took up the case of societies, the Super-organic realm, where these evolutionary principles manifest themselves in the form of

increased differentiation of social structure and functions in society. He found that in case of societies evolution and pattern of social change can be discerned from the fact that societies change from a simple and homogeneous collectivities to more heterogeneous societies where increased size of the aggregate combined with emerging differences in environmental conditions, necessitate a more diversified and differentiated society, both in its social structure and social functions. The increased differentiation manifested mainly in increased complexity of division of labour is associated with increased level of integration achieved in societies through greater mutual interdependence. As a society evolves from lower level of existence to a higher level, its capacity to integrate itself and respond effectively to external and internal challenges becomes better. His evolutionary scheme of societies is also reflected in his typology of societies which we shall read in the other chapter.

3.5 SIGNIFICANT FEATURE OF SPENCER'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION :

Some of the significant features of Spencer's evolutionary theory can be pointed out at this stage. These are;

- i. According to Spencer evolution is a universal process. It is applicable not only to social phenomena but to phenomena that occur in world. Social transformation is merely an example and a part of this process which pervades the whole world.
- ii. Same laws of change and transformation holds throughout universe and in all its divisions.
- iii. There are not several kinds of evolution having certain traits in common rather there is just one evolutionary process which is going on everywhere in the universe and in the same manner.
- iv. Evolution is the basic principle defining change and motion in world. All phenomena, be it inorganic, organic or super-organic, goes through the same process of evolution though gets manifested in different ways

and forms.

- v. His theory is based on scientific knowledge which can be explained and testified.

REVISION TEST -II

- a) Describe briefly the main features of Spencer's evolutionary theory?

- b) Describe the nature of change as described in Spencer's evolutionary theory.

- c) What do you understand by social order?

3.6 SUMMARY :

Spencer was one of the leading evolutionist thinkers of his time. Though a sociologist, his areas of concern went beyond any single discipline. He also finds it necessary. He also mentions that as sociologists we have to understand and borrow from both biology and psychology since societies are products of social actions and relationship of men who in turn are governed by their biological and psychological nature. The task he set before sociologists for constructing a synthetic philosophy was too ambitious to be achieved by one man at least. His comprehensive understanding of the processes and principles of evolution helped him in developing and analyzing social change and social

phenomena in concrete terms. He also developed his own classification of societies in the backdrop of his evolutionary theory.

3.7 KEY WORDS/CONCEPTS :

Readings

Differentiation

The process whereby an institutional activity becomes divided and more specialized in two or more separate institutional activities. Differentiation is a term derived from biology to describe the specialization of functions in society in a process of social evolution.

Evolution

The process of unfolding. The process of continuous change from a lower, simple, or worse to a higher, more complex or better state. It is a process of growth and development. It is a process of change that is propelled by the internal dynamics and external conditions of a particular phenomenon.

Moving Equilibrium

It is a concept used by Spencer to explain the process of evolution in which all matter and form is constantly and continuously found to be in a state of motion. The direction of this motion is determined by those internal and external conditions which lead the matter and form to a more stable and coherent condition of existence. This constant adjustment and readjustment to diverging internal and external conditions in which a state of stability is constantly being achieved is called 'moving equilibrium'.

3.8 QUESTIONS FOR EXERCISE

Short Type Questions:

- a) What is a complex society?
- b) What is a homogeneous society?
- c) What is meant by differentiation?
- d) What happens when societies evolve?

Long Type Questions :

- a) What were the favourable social and historical circumstances that led to the popularity of evolutionist theories among the western scholars?
- b) What do you understand by evolution?

- c) From the viewpoint of evolution what is explained by the idea of basic substance or force in nature?
- d) Describe briefly the laws of physics which form the basis of Spencer's theory of evolution?
- e) What kinds of changes are associated with social change propelled by the process of evolution?
- f) What is meant by 'moving equilibrium'?

3.9 Suggested Readings :

Abraham, F and J. H. Morgan, Sociological Thought, Macmillan: Delhi, 1985.

Fletcher, Ronald The Making of Sociology: A Study of Sociological Theory, Vol-1, Rawat Publishers, Jaipur, 1994.

Mann, Michael(ed) Macmillan Student Encyclopedia of Sociology, Macmillan Press: London, 1994

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ORGANIC ANALOGY**Structure :**

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Meaning of Organic Analogy
- 4.3 Spencer's Organic Analogy
 - 4.3.1 Similarities between society and organism
 - 4.3.2 Differences between society and organism
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 Key Words/Concepts
- 4.6 Exercise Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES :

The main objectives of this unit are that after it is thoroughly read, the student shall be able to :

- * define the concept of organic analogy.
- * explain the organic analogy of Spencer.
- * understand the main objectives of Spencer's scheme of organic analogy.
- * discuss the similarities between society and a living organism.
- * describe dissimilarities between society and a living organism.

4.1 INTRODUCTION :

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a British Sociologist who contributed tremendously in the study of social change from the perspective of evolutionism. Spencer had an early interest in Geology that led him to Biology as well which in turn shaped many of his ideas related to evolution of society. It was his inspiration from his readings of Biology that led him to use the metaphors and examples from the biological sciences with such an ease and clarity. Although his use of examples from inorganic world helped him to

explain most of his concepts and the principles of evolutionism, as discussed in the previous chapter, it was his organic analogy that received maximum attention in his theory of evolution.

4.2 Meaning OF ORGANIC ANALOGY :

Analogy means making comparison between two entities which are otherwise unlike with an inference that if two or more things agree with one another in some respects they will probably agree in others too. In Sociology analogies are often drawn between society and machine, or society and human body with the purpose of highlighting the interconnectedness of different parts of human society and enabling us to look at it as a complete system in itself. In classical sociological functionalism this type of analogy was often used by different social thinkers. Other important sociologists who have used such analogies in their attempt to explain and understand society are Durkheim and Parsons.

REVISION TEST -I

a) Organic analogy?

b) What is the difference between organic and super organic?

c) Is Spencer also considered a functionalist?

4.3 SPENCER'S ORGANIC ANALOGY :

In his book *The Principles of Sociology*, Herbert Spencer classified universe as divided into three main realms. These main realms according to him are the inorganic (physical, chemical), the organic (biological, psychological) and the super-organic (sociological). He wanted to develop such universal laws that could explain the properties of all these realms. Though his understanding of evolutionary process as an underlying principle determining the shape and character of all visible phenomena is primarily derived from his knowledge of laws of physics, it was his comparison of society with living organisms which drew maximum attention. According to his analysis super-organic bodies like society could be well compared with organic bodies like a living organism as the "principles of organization" of these two realms of the universe share much in common. In fact, one finds him judiciously using on one hand the concepts of 'matter', 'force' and 'motion' from the 'inorganic realm' along with the basic laws governing their interaction and on the other hand concepts like 'growth', 'development', 'survival' from the 'organic realm' to understand the dynamics of change and movement in all phenomena in the 'super-organic realm'. With the help of principles of 'inorganic realm' and facts of 'organic realm' he tries to explain phenomena in the 'super-organic realm'. In simpler words, he combined the findings of Biology with the scientific concepts and laws of Physics to explain the changes and developments in society.

The real analogy between an individual organism and a social organism becomes highly appropriate, according to Spencer, given the fact that certain necessities determining structure are common to both. Spencer used his analogy in much greater detail than most other thinkers. However, Spencer was always aware that he was dealing with an analogy only. In the beginning of his argument itself he points out that while discussing the evolution of human societies he was not thinking of this in terms of organic evolution but what he called super-organic evolution. Human societies, though having some characteristics similar to those possessed by organisms, were something more than biological organisms as such. They consisted of forms of social organization which were other than the characteristics of biological organisms and any change that took place in them was therefore a kind of change over and above organic change. Spencer used his analogy to make it perfectly clear what he meant by analyzing a society in terms of 'structure' and 'function' and the 'functional interdependence' of the parts in the social system as a whole.

Let us first take up the similarities drawn by him between the societies and living organisms. Spencer claimed that society evolved like a living organism. Living organisms increase in mass, their structure becomes more complicated or 'heterogeneous' and at the same time the division of physiological labour

causes differentiation in their parts leading thus to their mutual dependence. The same is true for societies. They also increase in volume (from smaller to bigger aggregates) and their structure become more complex and more defined as the division of labour becomes more advanced. In the 'social organism' Spencer also carried out a series of elaborate comparisons between the two types of organisms. Simple tribal societies were compared to primitive animals like hydra; feudal societies were compared to simple vertebrates and in the modern era the mass of circulating commodities became the equivalent of blood or nutritive liquids, roads were blood vessels, railroads were the arteries and veins were telegraph lines etc. Construction of such parallel image of society vis-à-vis a living organism also necessitated explanation of various other similarities between the two.

4.3.1 Similarities between Society and Organism :

- (i) Both society and organism grow in size. As with living organisms, society also grows in size with increase in its population, ^{example} number of social institutions etc. Simple aggregates like nomadic bands combine together to form tribes. These tribes then combine together into larger conglomerates which later on unite further into still larger social aggregates. This process of growth in size and volume of society is akin to growth in size of living organisms where multiplication of cells and their fusion into single units increases the volume and size of various organs of body.
- (ii) As in living organisms, growth in size is accompanied by differentiation of the internal elements of a structure. With increased differentiation comes the increased complexity in internal organization of the systems. As society grows into larger aggregates, to maintain integration and coordination among its members, society develops more complicated set of rules and regulations reflected in the growth of institutions. New institutions emerge to attend to the new challenges and needs developed in society due to its growth in size and volume.
- (iii) Differentiated of structure is accompanied by the differentiation of functions as well. As the living organisms grow their organs become structurally more distinct and strong. As these organs become more and more stable they also become more specialized and efficient in doing the tasks for which they are built. Similarly in society as the institutions become distinct in their structure they also become specialized in their functions. Growth of society is accompanied by growth in specialized institutions with their specialized functions. Therefore, specialization of structures and functions develops together and makes society a complex whole.
- (iv) Increased differentiation of structure and functions also enhances the capacity of organism to keep itself integrated in a more complex environment. The challenges and needs of a larger organism are met more effectively

through the process of differentiation of structure and function only. In society also with its increased complexity it needs specialized institutions with their specialized functions to ensure not only its survival but also its ability to effectively organize itself into a complete whole. Increased specialization also entails increased interdependence of parts of society which helps in maintaining its unity.

(v) The changes brought in their size, structure and functions are not random and arbitrary but the end products of a gradual process of adjustment and adaptation to the environmental factors. Both living organisms and societies encounter various types of environmental problems and challenges. The evolutionary principle demands that to overcome external challenges both entities develop their own internal responses to overcome the external threat.

(vi) Even though their whole unity, as such, may be destroyed, the individual parts-in both- may continue to live for some time afterwards. The parts of both possess a certain independence and continuity. For example when an organism dies certain parts continue to grow even though they no longer perform their appropriate function in the life of the organism as a whole. Similarly, if a human society is destroyed as a total independent entity-by conquest, earthquake, etc even in this overall context of disorganization, certain parts and components of the society may continue to function. For example, family groups may continue to exist, some local communities may retain their entity, religious practices may survive, and so on.

(vii) Spencer believed in an 'inherent progressive tendency' in nature and also in the inevitability of progress. Hence, he believed that like living organisms, society also necessarily progresses to higher levels of existence combined with better capacities to cope with its environmental challenges and develop into a more stable and healthier state.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LIVING ORGANISM AND SOCIETY

SIMILARITIES	LIVING ORGANISM	SOCIETY
Growth in size	As growth of body	As growth in population
Differentiation in structure	Development of limbs and other body organs	growth in family
Differentiation in functions	Effective specialized functioning of developed body organs	Differentiation in functions
Adjustment with nature/ environment	Adjustment in different kind of external conditions like winters, summers etc.	Adjustment in different kind of external conditions threat of war with other communities, changing social needs, etc.
Integration of the system	Through specialized and interdependent organs	Through specialized and interdependent institutions
Individual units as a part of a whole but also somewhat independent.	Some parts of body continue to exist even after the demise of the body.	Some communities and social practices continue exist even after a particular society is disbanded.

Despite the similarities mentioned above the dissimilarities between the two entities cannot be overlooked. One significant difference between biological organisms and social organisms is that unlike biological organisms, living units of a society always have individual consciousness. It is for this reason that Spencer believed that the welfare of the citizens cannot always be sacrificed to the supposed benefit of society. This fact was crucial in determining Spencer's inclination towards a more liberal political position. Now we discuss some of the differences that Spencer delineates between a society and a living organism. He made equally good effort to delineate the differences between the two and highlight the dissimilarities. His delineation of differences between the two entities also helped in answering many undue criticism that he was inviting because of his analogy. It also highlights the fact that this analogy is not to be taken in simplistic terms but needs to be understood keeping in mind the finer points of distinction.

4.3.2 Differences between society and organism :

(i) In an organism the parts, the internal units, form-together-a united living whole; a concrete physical entity. The parts are bound together in actual physical connection with each other. In a society, however, the parts are separated and dispersed. For example, families are disconnected from each other and widely dispersed throughout a country. Similarly, schools, industrial firms, political parties and other groups and institutions are all interrelated but yet distinct and separate entities. Whereas, in an organism, the brain, the lungs, the heart, are actually in physical interconnection with each other.

(ii) In an organism, the internal differentiations of structure and function result in the fact that particular functions are fulfilled by specific organs alone, and by no other. For example, the brain may be said to be the 'organ of thought' and no other organ in the body can fulfill that function. This however, according to Spencer, is not true of human society. It is not the case that the government of a society is the sole 'organ of thought' or the sole 'seat of authority'. All human beings in a society and as members of all institutions, to some extent share all these functions amongst each other. Specialization occurs among forms of Social organization but the specialization is different in kind from that which takes place among the parts of an organism.

(iii) An important difference between the living organisms and society is that while the parts of a living organism function to maintain the unity and betterment of the whole, in case of society it is the other way round. Implying thereby that society functions for the betterment and welfare of its constituting members and the welfare of individual members is very important in the evolutionary process. In this point too Spencer wanted to make it very clear that his analogy did not mean that the individual was subordinated to the state. The point in discussion is further elaborated upon in the next chapter where Spencer's typology of societies is discussed at length.

(iv) In living organisms emergence of central nervous system and the development of brain - whose function is to control the rest of the body - is a sign of a highly developed animal however this is not so in the case of social organisms. On the contrary presence of central coercive authority in social organisms is a sign of low phase of evolution. Such a state according to Spencer is transitory and of lower order. This distinction becomes clearer when in the next chapter we read the typology of societies as discussed by Spencer where he associates highly centralized authority to a distinguishing feature of coercive and primitive societies. Such societies are termed as Militant societies by him. The indicator of a developed society is a type of

social organization where the control over its members is decentralized.

(v) Another important difference is that process of evolution is much easily visible in case of social aggregates than in case of biological systems. In Biology the theory of evolution is accepted because it accounts for various biological facts as we see them today and supported by some evidence from the fossilized plants and animals. Nobody has ever seen a plant or any other living organism transforming into a new species. The type of evolutionary change suggested in biological realm is supposed to be a cumulative product of thousands of years. The only transformation that we see is that of a child or an egg into an adult being. On the other hand, transformation in social realm is at times much more fast and visible as many changes can be experienced within one's lifespan. Moreover, there are various historical records that help in describing and mapping the transformations that a society has experienced over the years and over generations.

(vi) Social aggregates show another interesting difference vis-à-vis biological organism. It has been noted that when new biological species evolve as a result of adaptation to its environment, it does not ordinarily replace the older species. For example, when single celled species developed into multi-cellular species it was more of an off shoot that coexisted with the single cell species. Evolution of human beings from apes did not mean that apes would cease to exist. However, the trend of transformation in super-organic realm is of a different nature. Normally when societies transform they do away with their past practices and structures. Transformation from one form of government or religion to another would imply that the newly formed government or religion will consume the old one and the two will not coexist. Modern democratic State has not only evolved out of simpler tribal type of authority but also has replaced and subsumed by it. Transformation in social aggregates is associated with elimination and absorption of the previous forms.

DIFFERENCES

LIVING ORGANISM	SOCIETY
Parts connected together to form a physical entity	Parts separated and dispersed
Parts with specialized functions are unique	Parts with specialized functions are not unique
Parts function for the good of the whole	The whole function for the good of the parts

Transformation not easily visible Evolution implies growing trend towards centralization of control	Transformation more easily visible Evolution implies growing trend towards decentralization of control
Newly evolved species do not replace or consume the previous type from which it is evolved. They often co-exist.	Newly evolved social aggregates often replace and eradicate the previous forms from which they are evolved.

Though Spencer was very cautious in drawing analogy in the manner that differences are equally well highlighted so that simplistic statements are avoided. However, Spencer used this analogy in many of his books and in almost all his discussions. He did it so frequently and with such details that it is not surprising that many people think that he was interpreting social institutions and their changes in terms of biological evolution. Spencer's analysis of the process of differentiation of structures and functions in the pattern of evolutionary change gave his account a far greater clarity than many other writers. It also enabled him to construct very clear models of certain types of society and thus to make very clear indeed what he meant by the process of social evolution.

Spencer's analogy has often been misunderstood as a simplistic assertion on his part that society living organisms behave in the same fashion. A deeper appraisal of his theory however, helps one appreciate that while drawing analogy Spencer was acutely aware of the finer differences between society and living organisms, perhaps that is why he uses the terms 'supra-organic' for social aggregates like society while using the term 'organic' for all biological entities. One should not miss the point that organic analogy of Spencer was meant to understand various processes of change and development in social realm and for that purpose his analogy had been quite a success. The analogy also became basis for the structural functional approach in sociology and paved way for evolutionary theories.

REVISION TEST -II

a) Describe briefly Spencer's Organic Analogy?

- b) According to Spencer how does Organic Analogy help understand the functioning and structure of any society?
-
-

- c) What according to Spencer is meant by the term 'differentiation'?
-
-

4.4 SUMMARY :

The organic analogy of Spencer helps in better and clearer understanding of the dynamic quality of society, especially its adaptive capacity. His organic analogy helps him in building a more systematic theory of evolution in which societies are seen developing more in both size and increase in its structure. Differentiation of structure associated by differentiation of functions is well captured by his organic analogy. The comparisons drawn make it convenient for the reader to associate with the idea more closely. However, Spencer was despite his emphasis on the similarities between the two organisms careful enough to highlight the differences in order to give not only a more balanced perspective but also to avoid any unnecessary confusion that may emerge from over emphasizing the similarities between the two.

4.5 KEY WORDS/CONCEPTS :

Differentiation

The process whereby an institutional activity becomes divided and more specialised in two or more separate institutional activities. Differentiation is a term derived from biology to describe the specialisation of functions in society in a process of social evolution.

Organic Analogy

In Sociology analogies are made between society and machine, or society and human body with an intention to help us understand the interconnectedness of human society and other similar ideas. In classical sociological functionalism

this type of analogy was often used by different social thinkers. In organic analogy a comparison is drawn between society and a living organism.

Super-organic

Superimposed upon, and surpassing, merely organic evolution. Use of the term 'super organic' by Spencer reflects his belief that human social development can only be understood in evolutionary terms in which while different from biological evolution, human social evolution retains a basic continuity with biological evolution.

4.6 QUESTIONS FOR EXERCISE :

Short Type Questions :

- a) Define organic analogy.
- b) What do you mean by complicity of structure?
- c) Name the three realms into which Spencer divides the universe.
- d) What does growth in size does to a super organic body?

Long Type Questions :

- a) Mention two important similarities between organic and super organic bodies as explained by Spencer.
- b) Mention two important differences between organic and super organic bodies as explained by Spencer.
- c) Discuss the strength of Spencer's organic analogy
- d) What according to Spencer is the relation between structure and function?
- e) Is growth in size and differentiation of structure inevitable in society?
- f) The hereditary occupations of the four main leading caste groups.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS :

Mann, Michael(ed) Macmillan Student Encyclopedia of Sociology, Macmillan Press: London, 1994

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Abraham, F and J. H. Morgan, Sociological Thought, Macmillan: Delhi, 1985.

Types of Society

Structure :

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Definition of Society
- 5.3 Spencer's Types of Society
 - 5.3.1 Classification by degree of Composition
 - 5.3.1.1 Simple Societies
 - 5.3.1.2 Compound Societies
 - 5.3.1.3 Doubly Compound Societies
 - 5.3.1.4 Trebly Compound Societies
 - 5.3.2 Classification by the construction of types
 - 5.3.2.1 Militant Society
 - 5.3.2.2 Industrial Society
- 5.4 Summary
- 5.5 Key Words/Concepts
- 5.6 Exercise Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES :

The main objectives of this lesson are that after it is thoroughly read, the student shall be able to :

- * understand the classification of societies as given by Spencer.
- * how the evolutionary thought of Spencer which guided his theoretical understanding of development of societies.
- * understand the strength of Spencer's typology for analytical purposes.
- * understand the range of concerns covered by Spencer in his

analysis of society.

5.1 INTRODUCTION :

To understand Spencer's types of society, it helps to understand what he means by a society and what according to him is to be studied while studying a society. He undertook the task of classifying societies in the light of his evolutionary scheme and developed a typology as a tool to understand and analyze social structure and social change in any society. Spencer's conception of a 'society', and of its nature was very clear to him and with his discussion of the 'organic' analogy he took his analysis of society and social change even further.

5.2 DEFINITION OF SOCIETY :

According to Spencer, society is an aggregate of individuals who live as a collectivity in which all the individuals are related and interdependent on each other. It's a total system of elements of social organization and their interdependent functions within which individuals pursue their courses of social action. But an important qualification of this society that he conceptualized was that it was more than a mere collection of living organisms called human beings. As an entity, society was much more than a mere living organism and therefore he used the term 'super-organic' for his concept of society. An organizational entity over and above the level of the organism. As a collectivity society was more than a mere sum of its parts. As a whole, society was distinguishable because of the permanence of relations among its parts. A society therefore was an organizational entity consisting of the parts which are in interrelationship with each other.

To understand Spencer's typology of societies, it helps one to understand his evolutionary theory which forms the basis of his analytical framework. Evolutionary theories are explanations about the origin, development and diversity of biological species. Evolutionary theory combined two ideas; first, that evolutionary advancement involved the development of complex forms of social organization from simple ones, via the increasing differentiation of social structure and specialization of function. Second that these structural changes involved a parallel process of continuing moral, intellectual and aesthetic development.

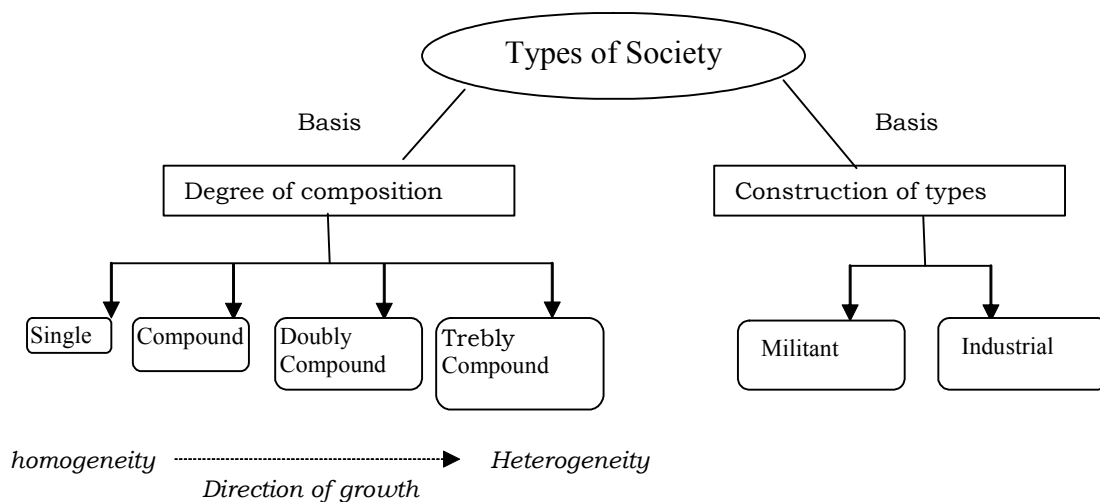
5.3 SPENCER'S TYPES OF SOCIETY :

Spencer's clear conception of the nature of a society enabled him to construct very clear models for the classification and comparison of societies. Two methods arose quite directly from his analysis. First: his evolutionary 'law' suggested that societies would change in terms of growth, aggregation, and

an increased differentiation institutions. Small, simple aggregates became clustered or 'compounded' as a result of many factors into larger, more complex, aggregates. Societies could be classified then on the basis of their 'degree of composition'.

Secondly, however, the actual and detailed processes of this 'aggregation' might be illuminated by a supplementary method of classification; the method of constructing models or types of societies in terms of their relative preponderance of one or other of the regulating, sustaining and distributive systems. A society which subordinated its entire pattern of life to its 'military' security would have a very different 'consensus' of institutions from one which subordinated its entire social life to the extension of wealth and welfare by developing its 'sustaining' economic system. And the patterns of aggregation which societies have undergone in historical change might prove to be significantly related to the changing predominance of one or other of these 'system'. Models of this kind would therefore provide another dimension of interpretation and understanding.

SPENCER'S TYPES OF SOCIETY



It is very important to notice two things about Spencer's methods of classification. Firstly, the two methods are quite different. The classification according to the 'degree of composition' rests upon an 'empirically determinate set of characteristics of social organization' which can be observed. It can be seen whether the society one is studying is a 'tribe', or a 'confederation of tribes', or a 'confederation of nations'; and societies of the same level of aggregation can be grouped together accordingly.

The classification according to 'typologies' or 'models' does not rest upon empirically determinate facts-though it referees to them in attempting interpretation. These 'types' or 'models' are hypothetical constructs. Spencer does not claim that societies actually exist in the extreme form which his models talk about. All societies will have some blend of the 'regulating', 'sustaining', and 'distributive system' and our understanding of this actual blend may be aided by our construction of analytical extremes.

5.3.1 Classification by 'degree of composition' :

According to Spencer, social evolution begins with small simple aggregates. A cluster of people staying together and organized into a definite and stable social whole form the most basic form of any society. As two or more clusters come together they form a larger aggregate. With the passage of time the aggregates keep growing into larger and larger entities. This increase in its size is a sign of its evolution and growth. As the degree of composition of a society varies, so does its social structure and related functions. Keeping in mind the evolutionary principle of increased differentiation in structure and function of society as it grows Spencer classified societies into four types, namely, simple, compound, doubly compound, and trebly compound societies.

It needs to be mentioned that this classification must not be taken as more than an approximation to the truth. The degrees of composition are defined quite clearly. Simple societies are formed with a small cluster of a few people. A compound society is formed when two or more simple societies come together. Similarly, a doubly compound society is composed of two or more than two compound societies. The largest aggregate is formed by the coalescing of two or more doubly compound societies. For Spencer, the movement from simple societies to compound to doubly compound and then to the trebly compound society is marked by increasing complexity of social structure along with increased differentiation at each stage of development of society from one type to the other. It is also a movement from an increasingly homogenized simple societies to increasingly heterogeneous trebly compound societies. Following is the type of corresponding social structure of each type of society mentioned by Spencer.

Type of Society	Social Structure
Simple	Families
Compound	Clans
Doubly Compound	Tribes
Treble Compound	Nation states

5.3.1.1 SIMPLE SOCIETIES :

Simple societies are of the first and simplest order. These are characterized by simple working wholes of which the parts cooperate with or without a regulating centre for certain public ends. The chief divisions and sub-divisions of these societies are also depicted in the diagram below.

Headless: Nomadic; Hunting; Semi Settled; Settled

Occasional Headship: Nomadic; Semi Settled; Settled

Vague and Unstable Headship: Nomadic; Semi Settled; Settled

Stable Headship: Nomadic; Semi Settled; Settled

In such societies life in general is nomadic in character and the small band of people remain together with and even without a political organization and a chief. Compact nature of such a society keeps its members sufficiently bound and together.

5.3.1.2 COMPOUND SOCIETIES :

Occasional Headship: Nomadic; Semi Settled; Settled

Unstable Headship: Nomadic; Semi Settled; Settled

Stable Headship: Nomadic; Semi Settled; Settled

Compound societies are formed by clustering of simple societies. In compounded societies, there is a supreme chief over and above the chiefs, if any, of smaller societies clustered together. Headship of compound societies is more stable as society becomes increasingly settled. A more settled compound society exhibits a systematic ranking and social ordering, slightly advanced division of labour, building of permanent dwellings like houses, and improved amenities of life.

5.3.1.3 DOUBLY COMPOUND SOCIETIES :

Occasional Headship: Semi Settled; Settled

Unstable Headship: Semi Settled; Settled

Stable Headship: Semi Settled; Settled

Doubly compounded societies are those formed by the coalescence of these compound groups, giving rise to more settled complex forms of social

organization with stable and more elaborate forms of headship, more appropriately referred to as government. Doubly compound societies are all completely settled. Increased settled life brings along an elaborate system of social order and hierarchy, a complex division of labour, an elaborate political organization and a formal legal system. Progress in knowledge and arts accompanied by a well developed legal system.

5.3.1.4 TREBLY COMOUND SOCITIES (CIVILIZED NATIONS) :

Trebly compound societies are the largest aggregates of society and these are all the 'great civilized nations' and large scale empires or federations of nations, whether of ancient or modern times. These aggregates are the most stable and organized in social, political matters and refined in cultural affairs.

REVISION TEST -I

a) What is evolution?

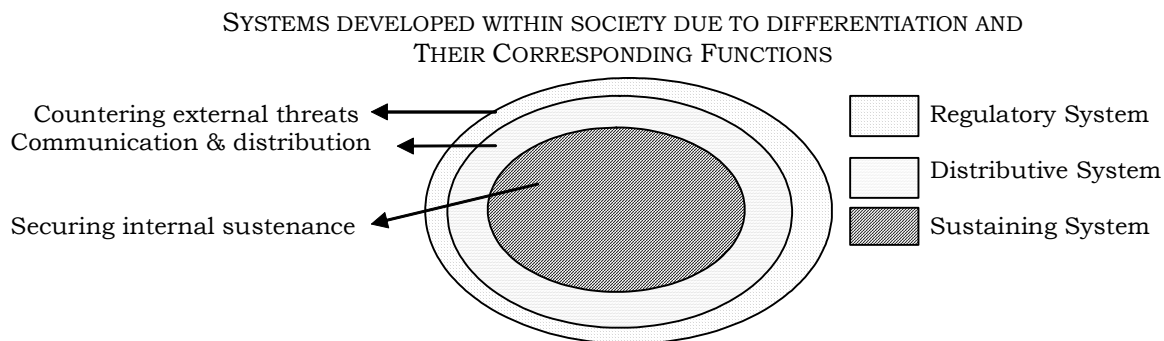
b) What is the feature of doubly compound society?

c) Describe a simple society as per Spencer?

Spencer introduced two subsidiary categories of classification into this scheme -namely that of stable or unstable 'headship' and whether the society was nomadic, semi-settled or settled but these do not require any particular comment. In this classification it has been seen that the societies drawn under these categories are both historical and contemporary. In short this is a classificatory scheme into which all societies of which we have knowledge can be manageably drawn. Moreover, its objective is no more than to arrange empirical knowledge of societies under certain headings so that further detailed comparative study can be undertaken.

5.3.2 Classification by the construction of 'types' :

Let us again look at Spencer's evolutionary understanding of society. Like living organisms, all societies have to deal with their physical and social environments, and during this course, initially two major differentiations take place accompanied by the third as they grow into a more complex whole. In order to organize a society better three systems are developed, one to provide outer protection and security from external threats, the other to promote inner sustenance with regard to the coordination of internal resources and the third to work as an intermediate system between the first two. The first system is referred to as a 'regulating system' catering primarily to the external needs of the society while the second one is referred as 'sustaining system' attending to the internal needs of the system and the third one is called the 'distributive system' and is chiefly responsible for economic productivity.



According to Spencer, until the first two systems are reasonably differentiated and developed there is no function of the third system and when the two systems develop appreciably they cannot develop further unless the third system also develops. A 'regulation system' was clearly differentiated from the 'sustaining system' of societies, and this was a fundamental differentiation of functions and appropriate structures. These two systems however, especially as they become larger in scale and more complex, had to be linked together

by an efficient network of communications and distribution of resources. This third differentiation of structures and functions gave rise to the 'distributive system'.

Spencer analyzed each society, then, into all its specific elements of social structure; all its 'organs' of social organization; but he then emphasized specially these differentiations of the 'regulating', 'sustaining', and 'distributive' systems, and examined the nature of societies by the relative predominance of each.

All the major aspects of 'evolutionary' change - of growth in size; of structural-functional differentiation; of the change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from the indefinite to the definite, from the incoherent to the coherent, and in various conditions of equilibrium were then studied with the use of this analytical model. And this leads us to consider us how Spencer went about the comparative study of the societies in order to establish a body of descriptive knowledge about them.

Spencer thought it most useful to construct two extremely dissimilar types, so dissimilar as to constitute a 'polarity', the 'militant' and the 'industrial' society. The first type was a type in which the 'regulating system' was dominant over all other aspects of society. The second was one in which the 'sustaining system' was emphasised and all other aspects of society were subordinated to its service. However, Spencer was clear regarding the fact both militant and industrial aspects existed in some combination in all societies and varied only in the preponderance of one system over the other.

5.3.2.1 THE MILITANT SOCIETY :

The militant society is a type in which the regulatory system dominates. Organization for offensive and defensive military action is predominant. It is one, said Spencer, in which the entire structure of society is closely moulded about its military structure, reflecting its military organization.

This type of society is characterized by a highly centralized pattern of authority and social control. During war the centralized authority lies with the commander of the military forces and during peace time this authority is taken over by the government. During war the lives and property of the soldiers lies at the disposal of the commander of the forces. Similarly, during peace the personal lives and property of the subject citizens remains in control of the government.

Often the military head is also the political head and exercises absolute power over the life and property of all his subjects. The organizational principles of a military set up are extended to social life as well. The sharp and highly strict hierarchical division of military organization becomes the dominant

mode of social and political organization in society. A clear, precise, and rigid hierarchy of power prevails throughout society, in which each level of officials has to be completely subservient to that above, and completely in power over those below. This rigid hierarchy of power necessarily involves a precise and rigid grading of social status and social ranking and thus gives rise to rigid social classes. The distribution of property, the distribution of material rewards in society, is clearly linked with the order of these social ranks. Obedience and subservience among the lower ranks is considered a virtue and disobedience a crime.

This system of sharp hierarchy is also reflected in the prevailing system of ideas and beliefs. The type of religion in such societies is also militant in character. This type of society is always in the state of antagonism and enmity with other societies. Wars are fought in the name of religion and sacrifices are made to propitiate the Gods. To assert the supremacy of their Gods and deities they often get in conflict with members of other religions.

The whole tenor of life in such a society is characterized by rigorous discipline and by close identity between private and public life. No element of the private life of the citizen is closed to the state. The state can invade and interfere in the private lives of citizens whenever it is felt necessary or desirable to do so. The great majority of the population is completely subjected to the regulatory purposes of the central authority. And this lack of individual rights in the relationship between individual and state is supported by the belief 'that its members exist for the benefit of the whole and not the whole for the benefit of its members. The loyalty of the individual to the state has to be unquestioning'. Law in such societies does not recognize any personal rights or interests. Interest of the nation or society is held above that of the individual member. Human relationships according to Spencer are characterized in this type of society by a state of 'compulsory co-operation'. Spencer takes help of organic analogy here to portray the characteristics of such a society. Just as a nervous system controls and commands all the differentiated parts of the body so are various organs of a militant society controlled and governed by centralized system of command, be it an individual or a select group of people.

5.3.2.2 THE INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY :

Spencer's 'Industrial society' is dominated by the 'sustaining system'. Meaning thereby that concerns or the focus in such a society is on the sustenance of inner working and management of the society rather than dealing with the threats from external sources. The regulatory system, though it still exists, is supplementary to the main system of sustenance. Such a scenario indicates that the concerns of dealing with external threat have been largely settled and the society has progressed to the stage where it can focus on attending

to its higher set of needs than merely struggling with the needs of survival. It implies therefore that this type of society is generally peaceful and concentrates upon the welfare and betterment of its members. The focus is more on economic development and communal harmony.

In this type of society, concerns of community are of paramount importance and the members of society are treated as important. Individual members of society have their rights as citizens and the role of government is to protect their rights. By doing so the government provides the members of society with basic security so that they may engage in socially and economically productive activities and contribute to the betterment of the whole society. Individual is considered a responsible and rational being and therefore enjoys certain liberties in matter of decision making. Members of society are not forced to participate in military activities of the society or in any other programme without their voluntary submission. The rights and privileges extended to them are ensured to be protected by means of representative government.

Role of government in such societies is not to enforce control on its subjects but to facilitate their well being by ensuring them freedom and liberty. The matters of conflict are settled either through arbitration or by the body of elected representatives. Governance of society is indirectly governed by the members of society themselves. Instead of centralized authority of Militant society with its coercive institutions, the Industrial society is marked by its decentralized authority with its democratic institutions. Political leadership and military leadership have their own spheres of operation. Members of society conform to social and political rules not out of fear but out of their voluntary willingness. Unlike Militant society where non-conformity was punished and willingness of the members not important, Industrial society honours the willingness of the members even if it means non-conformity to some of the rules. The differences in opinion and thinking causing non-conformity are not only allowed but at times also encouraged. Non-conformity leads to co-existence of variety of beliefs and wider acceptance of difference of opinion. The society, therefore, is tolerant towards differences and diversity.

In social realm, human relationships in the Industrial society are very different from those in the military society. For effective maintenance of society, the cultural differences and diversity demands greater degree of tolerance and respect towards others and sorting of differences through dialogue. For healthy dialogue it is important that all members are treated as equals. Hence, rigid hierarchies are absent in Industrial society. Relations of subordination and super ordination are replaced by relations of equality creating thereby an atmosphere more conducive for coordination and cooperation. The rules of social interaction are thus governed by the principles of cooperation that too

voluntary cooperation. As a result the class structure becomes more flexible and is increasingly governed by human relationships which are contractual and free. The differences of status and rank are less precisely marked allowing greater social exchange and interaction.

Even the economic relations of master-slave are replaced by relations between buyer of labour/services and seller of labour/services. The relationship between the two is voluntary and independent. Either of the two has the right to enter or not enter into any economic transaction. Commercial relations too are effected by free exchange.

Similarly, religious organization and beliefs lose their hierarchical structure and absolute power. Following a religion becomes a matter of individual choice and preference. The will of individual is not coerced to be sacrificed for the welfare of the larger society. It is believed that society exists to serve the interest of its individual members whose betterment will automatically lead to the betterment of larger society.

Spencer thought that comparison between these two specially constructed types was useful in conjunction with his other mode of classification (on the basis of degree of composition) in order to interpret and understand some of the crucially important trend of social evolution, and, especially, those trends which were of importance as traditional societies were being radically transformed by the processes of industrialization.

Having provided these modes of classifying societies, Spencer then undertook a very detailed comparative study of each major social institution within each 'type' of society; arranging an enormous range of descriptive facts into this classificatory framework in order to establish the main characteristics and trends of social evolution. This gave him a picture of what, in the whole field of social institutions had actually occurred in the past, and what was happening in the present.

The two types of society mentioned by Spencer can be well distinguished with the help of the table below which has been used by Coser in summing up the main points of difference between the two.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MILITANT AND INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**THE CONTRAST BETWEEN MILITANT AND INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES**

Characteristic	Militant Society	Industrial Society
Dominant function or activity	Corporate defensive and offensive activity for preservation and aggrandizement	Peaceful, mutual rendering of individual services
Principle of social coordination	Compulsory cooperation; regimentation by enforcement of orders; both positive and negative regulation of activity	Voluntary cooperation; regulation by contract and principles of justice; only negative regulation of activity
Relations between state and individual	Individuals exist for benefit of state; restraints on liberty, property and mobility	State exists for benefit of individuals; freedom; few restraints on property and mobility
Relations between state and other organizations	All organizations public; private organizations excluded	Private organizations encourage
Structure of state	Centralized	Decentralized
Structure of Social Stratification	Fixity of rank, occupation and locality; inheritance of positions	Plasticity and openness rank, occupation and locality; movement between positions
Type of economic activity	Economic autonomy and self-sufficiency; little external trade; protectionism	Loss of economic autonomy; interdependence via peaceful trade; free trade
Values social and personal characteristics	Patriotism; courage; reverence; loyalty; obedience; faith in authority; discipline	Independence; respect for others; resistance to coercion; individual initiative; truthfulness; kindness

Coser, Lewis A, Masters of Sociological Thought, Jaipur : Rawat Publishers, 1996.

These ideal type constructs of society and their distinction are still used effectively for analytical purposes. Both militant and industrial societies are better understood when contrasted with each other. Only the typical features of the two types of society have been highlighted in the description above. One does not find a society fitting so cleanly into either of the two categories but the constructs do help in at least identifying the dominant theme in a particular society.

REVISION TEST -II

a) Features of an Industrial society?

b) Describe the nature of human relationships in a military society.

c) What do you understand by classification by 'degree of composition'?

5.4 SUMMARY :

Spencer four types of societies in terms of their evolutionary stage: simple, compound, doubly compound and trebly compound, each being distinguished on the basis of the more or less complexity of their social structures and functions. There is an inherent tendency for the homogeneous to become

heterogeneous and the heterogeneous to become multiform. The main trend in the process of universal evolution is the increased differentiation of social structures into specialized functional systems which lead inevitably to better integration and adaptation to environment. Another classification of societies in terms of military to industrial society is based on the type of internal regulation within societies. The military society is characterized by compulsory cooperation, centralized government, rigid system of stratification and state domination. The Industrial society on the other hand is characterized by voluntary cooperation, decentralized government, relatively open system of social stratification, independent voluntary organizations and a state that exists for the benefit of the individual. Based on these modes of classifying societies, Spencer then undertook a very detailed comparative study of each major social institution within each 'type' of society; arranging an enormous range of descriptive facts into this classificatory framework in order to establish the main characteristics and trends of social evolution. His typology shows strength of his analytical capacity to understand and compare change in society.

5.5 Key Words/Concepts :

Industrial society

It's a type of society mentioned by Spencer while classifying societies on the basis of construction of 'types'. It is characterized by voluntary cooperation, decentralized government, relatively open system of social stratification, independent voluntary organizations and a state that exists for the benefit of the individual.

Compound Society

It's a type of society mentioned by Spencer while classifying societies on the basis of composition. It comes next only to simple societies in the scheme of evolution. Compound societies are those in which the simple groups of which they are compounded have their own respective chiefs under a supreme chief.

Militant Society

It's a type of society mentioned by Spencer while classifying societies on the basis of construction of 'types'. It is characterized by compulsory cooperation, centralized government, rigid system of stratification and state domination

5.6 QUESTIONS FOR EXERCISE :

Short Type Questions :

- a) Name the types of societies mentioned by Spencer.

- b) Which type of society is described by tribes?
- c) Which type of society is marked with contractual relationships?
- d) Which society is also called by Spencer as Militant society?

Long Type Questions :

- a) Mention the two typologies given by Spencer.
- b) What do you understand by Classification by the construction of 'types'?
- c) What is the role of state in military society?
- d) Which type of society is a better society according to Spencer?
- e) What is the role of state in Industrial society?
- f) Which type of society is marked by lesser rigidity?

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS :

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Karl Marx
Base and Super Structure

Structure :

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction to the Concept
- 6.2 Life Sketch of Karl Marx
- 6.3 Perception of Marx
- 6.4 Meaning of Totality
- 6.5 Base and Superstructure
 - 6.5.1 Meaning of Base
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 - 6.7.1 The Notion of Relative Autonomy
 - 6.7.2 Economic as determinant in the last instance
- 6.8 Conclusion
- 6.9 Key Words
- 6.10 Exercise Questions
- 6.11 Selected Readings

6.0 Objectives :

After going through this lesson you will be able to :

- * give the life sketch of Karl Marx.
- * explain the perception of Karl Marx.
- * define the meaning of Totality.
- * discuss Base and Superstructure.
- * establish relationships between Base and Superstructure.

6.1 Introduction to the Concept :

When some one thinks of communism or revolution, Karl Marx's name figures at the top. His friend and collaborator Frederick Engels is said to have remarked at his grave side that Marx as philosopher or writer was not even half the man, he was revolutionary above all. He wanted to change the world. He gave the famous slogan "Workers of All Countries, Unite." This unity of the working class is directed against the bourgeoisie whom he had wanted overthrown so that all means of production, so very essential for meeting the daily essential needs of men and women are socialized. It means that profits are shared by all the workers and not appropriated by the owner-capitalist alone. Marx was also fond of saying: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however, is to change it." This change meant revolution, a change down to the core of society, not merely cosmetic or superficial.

It was this reputation of societal change that the mainstream sociologists refrained from including him in their tribe till late. They would label him an economist, as he wrote *Das Kapital* or *The Capital* or a philosopher at the best as he talked about *Alienation* and *Poverty of Philosophy* etc. but never a sociologist. It is interesting to note that he not only understood the social character of the human society in terms of the social relations of production, mind you the phrase social relations, but informed us that it is the most important element in social construction of all other social institutions. This is the most compelling and powerful factor. Marx talked about social change and gave an elaborate theory as to how and why societies change.

Auguste Comte, the father of Sociology had also suggested that change is the law of nature. And it is equally true of society. But he never wanted the change to be brought about by the poor or the workers, an idea that was very dear to Marx. It is this difference with the founders and practitioners of Sociology that estranged the discipline from Marx. Even today sociologists own him with reservations thought he is clubbed with the master thinkers of the subject (Sociology) in all the under and postgraduate courses all over the world.

6.2 Life Sketch of Karl Marx :

Karl Marx was born in Germany at Trier in a well off middle class family. After finishing school he joined the Bonn University in 1835 when he was only 17 years old. He was there for an year only. He met Jenny there whom he later married and bore six children. From here he moved to the Berlin University where he studied for four years. There only he left his romanticism for Hegelianism. He was an important member of the Young Hegelians group dedicated to the study of Hegel, the great philosopher. Marx's scholarship was amazing as is clear from the following remark of a fellow student: "He

combines the deepest philosophical seriousness with the most biting wit. Imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel fused in one person - I say fused, not juxtaposed - and you have Dr. Marx." (McLellan 1975: 12) His radical writing and passion for freedom got him exiled first from Germany and then from France. Finally, he settled in London. He was busy reading, writing and doing activities of the Communist League. He used to sit 18 hours a day in the London Museum Library despite poor health. He spent days of poverty there. In 1856 he wrote to Engels: "My wife is ill, little Jenny is ill, Lenchen (the maid) has a sort of nervous fever. I could not and cannot call the doctor as I have no money for medicine. For 8-10 days I have fed the family on bread and potatoes..." (McLellan 1975: 18) He died in March 1883. His important works besides *The Capital* include *The Communist Manifesto*, *Theories of Surplus Value*, *Critique of the Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, *The Class Struggles in France*, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* etc.

6.3 Perception of Marx :

What notion an ordinary student has about Marx? That he was a communist and a revolutionary who wanted change in society in favour of the poor working people. That there should be no private ownership of means of production as it is the source of the workers' exploitation. The private property should be abolished.

There is nothing wrong in this perception of Marx, but he was also a great theoretician or a philosopher of revolution. He painstakingly studied the nature and development of human society through the ages and arrived at certain general laws (as one may say so) about social change. How should society be studied first of all? How could one obtain a comprehensive understanding of society? What method should be followed for achieving this goal? What is the cherished goal for mankind? What should such a civilized society be like?

It is pertinent to mention here that he did not accept the then dominant framework of social scientific methodology that was heavily influenced by the method of natural sciences like physics and chemistry. He was critical of scientific positivism suggested by Comte as the method of sociological enquiry. In the words of McLellan: "Throughout his life Marx was clear that natural science would have to lose what he called it 'one-sidedly materialist orientation' in order to be integrated in a total interpretation of man and society... that any science had to penetrate from the apparent movement of things to their real underlying causes. This involved a distinction between appearance and essence." (McLellan 1975: 58)

What is this new method? How does it help overcome the drawbacks of positivist

methodology? How should society be understood comprehensively?

6.4 Meaning of Totality :

Marx had suggested that all phenomena whether social or natural must be understood in **totality** which means that the problem or the variable to be examined must not be seen in isolation from the whole of which it is a part. There is intrinsic relation or connection between the part and its whole. One influences the other and vice versa. This relation is not static but dynamic or active. In one word it may be called dialectic. No doubt this concept and method was originally conceptualized by Hegel, and Marx does acknowledge this, but he was the first one to give it a materialist interpretation and apply it in social science. Marx had humbly submitted that Hegel was standing on his head, that he had simply put him back on his feet.

6.5 Base and Superstructure :

This schema of base and superstructure is very central to Marxist understanding of social reality. The base is also sometimes referred to as infrastructure by the French Marxists. A comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena in its totality is possible only if we see it in these two parts, namely base and superstructure. Analogically the foundation of a building is its base and the rooms raised on it make the superstructure.

6.5.1 Base :

As mentioned above, the base is likened to the foundation of a building that remains hidden under the ground yet it supports the whole structure or edifice raised over it. The nature and strength of the base determines the size and the strength of the building raised on it. Likewise what constitutes the strength of a society in the capitalist era? Surely it is the economic factor that weighs heavy over all others. But in pre-capitalist societies too economic factor played an important role though it was not both dominant and determinant as it is in the Capitalist era. Therefore the base of any society would be always economic that determines the nature, forms and types of the superstructure. The base is always materialist as it refers to the basic needs of humankind essential for its survival.

6.5.2 Superstructure :

This is the structure raised on the foundation or the base. All structures of the society namely religion, politics, education, philosophy, art and culture etc. are included in the list of superstructures. According to Marx all aspects of the superstructure, directly or indirectly, make an attempt to cover up or

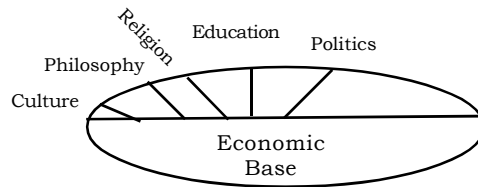
conceal the contradictions between the base and superstructure in a class divided society. These are broadly of two types, one that **directly** intervene to suppress the voice of those who make an attempt to speak against the contradictions of the system or for instance, demand wages due to them as a matter of their right. They may also be raising their voice against their victimization or exploitation without which profit is not generated. Even Guru Nanak had remarked that wealth (*maya*) cannot be accumulated without committing a sin (*paap*). This is the repressive state apparatus that suppresses the workers' strike or movement with a heavy hand. It includes the army, the police, the judiciary etc.

The other type plays its role **indirectly** only by concealing the contradictions in a manner that the recipients of such messages never discover the true meaning of them. The message is neither apparent nor easily identifiable. For instance, the media that includes both print and electronic, on paper or screen, often play such issues or news that suit the interests of those who control power. To take a recent example, President Musharraf of Pakistan has declared "emergency" there to check the disruptive forces (that means opposition) to hold fair elections. The official media of Pakistan is broadcasting such news again and again to convince people that there is no danger to the presidency of Musharraf which in fact is the true cause of imposing "emergency".

Similarly, President George Bush of the United States of America had declared war on Iraq to remove Saddam Hussain for "establishing democracy" there and to save the world from nuclear attack and biological warfare. The CNN aired these views round the clock to convince people round the globe that if Iraq was not attacked the whole humankind could face more dangerous terrorist attacks like the one on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. But now we know that Saddam Hussain had neither nuclear weapons nor biological organisms for launching any war against the USA or the West. Then why was Iraq attacked? If we try to look for answers to such questions we find that the fact of the matter is that the American lobby was interested in capturing the oil of Iraq which is the best in the world. This issue was never broadcast by the CNN or other American media. Thus the role of ideology is to conceal the real motives of the powers that be and manipulate public by projecting such issues that are dear to them. The real issue is never talked about. In our country too, Mrs. Indira Gandhi declared "emergency" since there was a threat to the "unity and integrity" of the country. As a matter of fact, the danger was not to the country but to her own political power, the seat of the Prime Minister.

Therefore all agencies of the superstructure, be it politics, education, religion, philosophy, culture or media speak the language of the powerful who control

the state hiding their real vested interests



6.6 Relation between the base and superstructure :

The nature of this relation is not simple but complex. This relation is dialectical. It means that no doubt superstructure is raised on the base hence the base is determining the nature and character of all its elements. But this does not mean that this determination is always and ever there in the same form. Many a times, under certain conditions, some element of the superstructure can also determine the very base itself. Thus this relation of cause and effect between the base and superstructure is neither fixed nor uniform as is the case in positivism. The scholars motivated by anti-Marxist ideology do not appreciate this subtle point. They see this relation between the two in positivist terms thus believing that economic is always the base and determines the superstructure. It is for this reason that they characterize Marxism as a determinist philosophy.

Check your knowledge :

1. What do you mean by Totality?

2. Define Base.

3. What is Superstructure?

6.7 Defining the nature of Relationship :

Two notions are very important in defining the nature of relation between the base and superstructure:

- (i) The notion of relative autonomy
- (ii) Economic as determinant in the last instance

6.7.1 Relative Autonomy :

This notion is very crucial in defining the relation between the two and it is this notion that distinguishes the Marxian method of defining a cause-effect relation between the two variables from the positivist methodology. This notion suggests that variable X or the base will be determining or causing the variable Y or the superstructure many a times but not always because the latter also enjoys autonomy or independence from the former. But this autonomy is only relative not absolute, which means that if at a given time "t1" under certain circumstances or conditions the economic base was determining let us say politics or religion, it does not mean that at another time "t2" under different conditions this relation will remain the same. It is very likely that now politics or religion will determine the base.

It may be easier to understand if I give you the example of our own state, Punjab. During the 1960s when the Green Revolution took off there was industrial growth and urban development all over the state. But when the Sikh militancy grew during the 1980s it was not economic base that was influencing the decline in industrial growth or out migration of people from here but religion or the politics of the militants. People did not heed for the decisions of the government taken at Chandigarh or Delhi but always looked forward to the dictates or orders coming from Amritsar. This means that during the decade and a half of the Sikh militancy, the politics of the militants or their religion became autonomous from the base and started influencing all elements of the superstructure be it the case of school dress or the registration of vehicles or the use of Punjabi or even the number of *baratis* in a marriage party etc. This example suggests that during this phase (1980s)

religion which is an element of the superstructure became autonomous but only relative to the earlier phase of the 1960s.

6.7.2 Economic as determinant in the last instance :

This phrase means that the economic factor is very important for human survival as it refers to the basic needs like *roti, kapda* and *makan* that are absolutely necessary for a civilized human existence. All human, rich or poor, living in rural or urban areas need a bare minimum of these three things. As all these three things are material goods, it is the economic factor which assumes importance. But that does not mean it remains the causal factor all the time. But since it is the most essential of all other elements of the superstructure -politics, religion, culture, education- it would remain the determining variable in the last instance that means not in the first place always.

Taking the above example again it may be argued that during the phase of Sikh militancy, the Sikh politics and religion were the determining variables. But when we look at its history or at its past to find out who were the youth that took to weapons or violence, we shall notice that these youth had no employment. The raised income of the Punjab peasantry as a result of the Green Revolution made their children free (from domestic labour) for studies but after that there was no scope for employment. The importance of the economic factor may also be gauged from this fact that when the militants started getting easy money through loot and extortion the Sikh militancy collapsed. Numerous of those very youth that took to militancy inspired by the Sikh religion and its history fell an easy prey to the award money and employment in police etc. The recent history stands witness to this fact once again that economic factor is important ultimately.

These two notions discussed above show that both Marx and his friend Engels had given importance to the economic factor, especially in the capitalist society, as a determining variable but never in the first place when some element of the superstructure may become the determining variable. Not others but some Marxists too had started interpreting and applying Marx wrongly which is why he had to say once that he was not a Marxist. Engels remarked categorically: "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction."

6.8 Conclusion :

Thus we may conclude this discussion by saying that Marx had suggested

the binary division of social reality into base and superstructure for a comprehensive understanding of the society in its totality in which parts are dialectically related to the whole. But the relation between the base and superstructure is not simple but complex. One may influence the other depending upon the situation but ultimately, the cause of the causes is always the material base.

6.9 Key words :

Base: It is the foundation of social reality. It is always material or economic as it deals with those elements that are essential for human survival.

Superstructure: It consists of all those elements of the social reality that are erected on the base like politics, religion, culture, education etc.

Relative autonomy: It means that some element of the superstructure may become autonomous or independent from the material base for the time being and start determining the base.

In the last instance: Any element of the superstructure may become relatively independent of the material base, but when we look for the cause of the causes, it would always be economic or material. Therefore economic base is determinant ultimately, in the last instance.

Totality: The whole is important in determining the parts or relations between them. The parts should not be seen in relation to each other independent of the whole.

6.10 Exercise Questions :

1. Describe the relation between the base and superstructure.
2. What do you mean by superstructure? Describe the notion of relative autonomy.
3. What is meant by base? How does it determine the superstructure in the last instance only?

Give short answers to the following questions:

- (a) Base
- (b) Superstructure
- (c) Relative autonomy
- (d) Totality

6.11 Selected readings :

Marx, Karl and F. Engels (1969) *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

McLellan, David (1975) *Marx*. Fontana Modern Masters.

McLellan, David (1980) *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction*. Delhi: Macmillan.

Karl Marx
Materialist Conception of History
Or
Historical Materialism

Structure :

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Features of Capitalist Society
- 7.3 Marx as Materialist
- 7.4 Laws of dialectical Materialism
- 7.5 Mode of Production
- 7.6 Stages of Human Society
 - 7.6.1 Primitive Communism
 - 7.6.2 Ancient Society
 - 7.6.3 Feudal Society
 - 7.6.4 Capitalist Society
 - 7.6.5 Socialist Society
 - 7.6.6 Communist Society
- 7.7 Conclusion
- 7.8 Key Words
- 7.9 Exercise Questions
- 7.10 Selected Readings

7.0 Objectives :

Going through this lesson will enable you to :

- * define the features of Capitalist Society
- * tell Marx as a Materialist
- * explain the laws of Dialectical Materialism

* discuss various stages of Human Society according to Karl Marx.

7.1 Introduction :

Karl Marx was primarily a student of capitalist society who wanted to know why the human society had come to such a pass where the rich are becoming rich and richer and the poor are becoming poorer. Now there are about 358 families only in the world who control more than two thirds of the world's total wealth. How has it happened? And, why?

7.2 Features of Capitalist Society :

One of the main features of the capitalist society is that there is a class of the bourgeoisie or the capitalists who own capital and all the profit churned out from it remains under their control. This class is opposed to another class called the proletariat or the workers who do not own capital but possess physical labour which is so very essential for the production of commodities or goods that are sold in the market to harness profit. The relation between the two classes is antagonistic, that is why the capitalist grows rich and the workers remain poor.

Marx wanted to know how the modern capitalist society has come to stay. What was the nature of classes in the pre-capitalist societies? It is sufficient to note here that the concept of class refers to the position of individuals in a given mode of production in terms of the ownership or absence of ownership of the means of production. We shall deal with this concept in detail in another chapter on "social classes and the class struggle". Marx travels back in time to look into the nature and types of classes in the pre-capitalist societies. Interestingly he found out that there had always been two major classes of owners and non-owners, the relation between them determined the nature of that society.

7.3 Marx as Materialist :

Marx was a materialist and not an idealist that Hegel was. And he believed that since material reality is primary as it deals with the basic needs of human existence (see lesson on "Base and Superstructure") the only way to understand the nature of human society is to discover the laws of transformation of material reality. That is why he said that Hegel was "standing on his head" as he gave primacy to ideas in the human mind that can shape the material reality the way it wants. But Marx asked the question where do ideas come from? He answered that ideas are nothing more than a reflection of the material reality. That is why he said: "It is not the consciousness of

men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."

7.4 Laws of Dialectical Materialism :

Thus applying the laws of **dialectical materialism** that reality is always a unity of opposites and the quantity is transformed into quality and vice versa. The negation of negation is responsible for the movement as advancement. For example, the seed of a plant gets negated when sown in the field to give rise to a plant that bears numerous flowers. The flowers must be negated to bear as many fruit as there are flowers. The fruit borne finally must get negated to release many seeds. Thus from a single seed we obtain hundreds of plants of the same species following the law of negation of negation. Similarly the social classes in human society too follow the law of negation to reproduce classes to keep the society going. Marx mentions when the material conditions for the new society are already mature in the womb of previous society only then the new society shall be delivered.

Applying these laws Marx wanted to understand the movement of human society in history. He says, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." He wanted to look into the nature of changes in material reality that according to him determined the nature of society. Thus he gave a "materialist conception of history" which is often labeled as Historical Materialism, in short. According to Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* historical materialism "designate(s) that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another." Marx however preferred the "materialist conception of history" to "historical materialism" as the latter one appears more like a fixed law which was not to his liking. However he found out that the European society had gone through three major phases of production of material reality or modes of production, namely ancient, feudal and capitalist, and in that order.

7.5 Mode of production :

In simple terms it refers to the method of production of the very means of existence by the human beings. This is the defining feature of humankind. We do not consume nature (now as we are civilized) in its raw form but transform it with the help of human labour into a consumable item as for

instance we cook the vegetables or meat, stitch the clothes and construct our dwellings or houses. For the production of such consumable items numerous people are required to come together in the production process where they are related to each other in definite ways. They form specific relations of production which are characteristic of a given type of society.

For example, the making of chapatti may appear a very simple affair when you tell your mother, "I need nothing, just make me a sweet chapatti." But when you look at it as only a step in the long chain of production you would realize the complexity of the issue. For a simple chapatti your mother needed flour from the flour mill, who had bought wheat from the grain market where the farmer had brought his produce after harvesting and cleaning it. In the market it was unloaded and cleaned by labour where the tractor-trolley transported it with a driver. For sowing the wheat the field had to be dressed properly after ploughing, manuring and watering the crop all round the season. Besides, your mother too needs an iron plate, a stove or gas, a lighter etc. Therefore it is clear that until all these steps are not carried out in a strict sequence it would not be possible to have a simple chapatti.

All these activities are executed or carried out by men in their different roles that fall into two classes, those who own land and capital and others who own physical labour only. For doing this labour, they are now paid cash but earlier they were given wages in kind only that was primarily some grain necessary for their subsistence. The nature and type of exchange were dependent on the mode of production.

The mode of production consists of two elements, namely **forces of production** and the **social relations of production**. The former include land or capital and the instruments necessary for production which were earlier based on handicraft technology and now mechanical or electrical technology. The social relations of production refer to the social classes that are formed during the production process, as for example the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in modern industry. And, the agricultural labour and the peasant or the landlord in the rural sector.

The humankind throughout its history has gone through various modes of production each one characterizing a specific type of society. It is worth noting Marx in detail from his "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independently of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal

and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or -this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms- with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure...In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production...

Check your knowledge :

- (1) Give any two features of Capitalist Society.

- (2) What are the laws of Dialectical Materialism?

- (3) Name two elements of Mode of Production.

7.6 Stages of human society :

The contradictions of various sorts between social classes in different modes of production have resulted in its change and hence change in the type of society. A brief description of each of these stages of human society is necessary for understanding the subject.

7.6.1 Primitive Communism: To begin with, the mankind practiced communism in the sense that each individual got what one needed. The communist principle is "To each according to one's needs." The early humankind moved in hunting or gathering bands who pooled their collections during the day at one place and asked all its members to share the food as much as one needed. If a weak person was not able to kill a hunt or gather some food, she was not denied food. This precisely is communism, to share with everyone what one has.

7.6.2 Ancient Society : When some persons became stronger than others they started dominating the weaker ones and exploited them to undertake physical labour to provide goods and services to them. This class came to be called as **masters** who had become the owners of land and men and material. The men were **slaves** who were bought and sold to others by the specialists in this trade. The social relations between the masters and the slaves were definitely based on antagonistic contradictions such that the former grew richer and the latter poorer. The social condition of the slaves was no better than the animals. The slaves were the property of the master in literal terms as the animals in his possession were. The labour of the slaves was used to harness agricultural produce from the land which was the source of power of the master over others and slaves. The latter used to run away from their master owners who hunted them out, captured as if they were animals and returned home. This was the first phase of the class divided society in the history of humankind.

7.6.3 Feudal Society: This society is characterized with the presence of a **feudal lord** who exercised complete control over the means of production both in terms of the land and instruments of production used thereof and the physical labour of those who worked in the fields. These were called **serfs**. The technology was relatively simple which was also based on animal power. The class of serfs used to remain attached to a particular lord on whom they were dependent for their food and shelter that were given to them by the lord for their services, that is, working in the fields. As they were given payment for labour only in kind, in the form of grain etc. its quantity was limited such that they could barely survive or subsist. To meet their needs beyond the bare minimum, the serfs were coerced to borrow grain or money from the lord. The rates of interest were so heavy that a serf could not pay the debt in

his life time. The debt would pass on to his son who was also made to work on the same land as his father. This system of debt payment continued for generations. Thus the serfs were bound to the lord. That is why Marx had remarked that the serfs enjoyed the security of work, food and shelter from the lord even if they did not have the freedom to leave him.

7.6.4 Capitalist society: This is the contemporary society in most parts of the world, including our own country. It is characterized with the capitalist mode of production that means all means of production -capital, industry, machines, tools and labour of the workers- are owned by the **bourgeoisie** or the **capitalist**. The **workers** or the **proletariat**, in the true sense of the term, do not even own their labour. The price tag on their labour is fixed by the market itself. Those of you from the village background would have noticed that the price of labour goes high during the harvesting or sowing seasons as compared to other times. For instance, a workman who could be hired for a daily wage of Rs. 100 only in the normal times, he would be hired for Rs. 150 only during the harvesting season.

The worker is given only that much wage that is necessary for his bare survival, that is, he is given only as much money for selling his labour for a day with which he can buy only that much grain or food with which he can barely manage to live. He cannot eat to his fill. This is called **subsistence wage**. It is so fixed such that the rest of value generated with that labour goes to make the profit of the capitalist or the industrialist. The more the wages of the labour, lesser would be the profit of the capitalist. Therefore the relation between the worker and the capitalist are antagonistic.

In capitalist society **money** is the central commodity. Every thing revolves around it. Marx said that in capitalist society, all social relations including family relations will be turned into money relations. One without money is a pauper who has no social status in such a society but the one who has much of it enjoys all the privileges social or political. Marx writes about money:

Money's properties are my properties and essential powers - the properties and powers of its possessor. Thus, what I am and am capable of is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy for myself the most beautiful of women. Therefore I am not ugly for the effect of ugliness - its deterrent power- is nullified by money. I, as an individual, am lame but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet. Therefore I am not lame. I am bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid; but money is honoured, and hence its possessor. Money is the supreme good; therefore its possessor is good.

We may see the effect of money on social relations happen right in our own society. We celebrate *raksha bandhan* with much reverence. It is an epitome of brother's love for his sister(s) for whom he may undertake any ordeal. He

stands with her in thick and thin. But what has happened now. When money has assumed so much importance, the sisters and brothers are fighting against each other for share in parental property. A large number of property cases are being contested in the civil courts now. This has happened only in the recent past. Earlier sisters would not claim any share in the parental property. They would like to retain a strong link with their *peke*. They were more interested in keeping social relations with their brothers than sever them for some share in the property. Now they may have property of their parents but no social relations with their brothers. This precisely is the effect of capitalist system on society or social relations.

With the development of science and technology, capitalist society has witnessed tremendous social change experienced never before in the human history. All hitherto sleeping societies were shaken off from slumber and made an integral part of the market which obviously is the international market. This has resulted in the rise of big cities, huge industries, large scale migrations -regional, national and international- of populations.

7.6.5 Socialist Society: Since capitalist society is based on antagonistic contradictions it will not make a stable society with long span of life. Different classes are pulling the society and its resources in their own direction for their own benefit alone. The weak, the poor and the marginal will be pushed further against the wall who will have to rise in revolution against the existing relations of production. They would like to socialize the means of production, meaning thereby that there would be no single minority class of individuals who would control all the means of production and expropriate the profit thereof. The profit will belong to the working class and would be shared by all the producers. The political party of the workers will ensure that no person or institution bosses over others and each and every person gets *roti, kapda aur makan* irrespective of his work or status. Each will be given according to his work. And all kinds of work will have same importance.

7.6.6 Communist Society: This is the last stage in the history of human civilization. The history will now have its full circle starting from primitive communism, but with a difference. This is scientific communism where the drudgery of physical human labour will be eliminated by machines. The technology will make available ample free time to humankind to achieve all those pursuits of life that it could not in earlier societies for being engrossed in making a living. Marx has argued that man would be able to develop fine sensibility only when he is relieved of the drudgery of physical labour.

Therefore, in communist society all men and women shall be free to pursue their own tastes, the way they like. There will be no restrictions of discipline or rule from outside. A person will read Shakespeare, go for fishing, will play Bethoven and shall work when he likes to do that, on his free will. In nutshell,

there shall be no state: "The state will whither away."

Thus we find that the human history has traversed through the class divided societies -ancient, feudal and capitalist- on the European soil and moved on to socialist society of the erstwhile Soviet Union along with East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia etc. But there is another type of society in Asia, the Orient which was characterized by high stability. Marx called it **Asiatic** society with characteristic Asiatic mode of production. In it the means of production belong to the community and when it has grown beyond limits of subsistence, a section of this population moves to a different place and set up a new settlement which is an exact replica of the previous society.

7.7 Conclusion :

In this lesson we have seen how Marx has shown the movement of human society from its primitive most position to scientific socialism based on science and technology. The mode of production is the defining category for each society. A society based on antagonistic contradictions must finally give way to a classless society where there would be no notion of private property and all individuals will be truly equal. This is the materialist interpretation of history of human society.

7.8 Key words :

Historical materialism: An approach or method to interpret human history in terms of the changes in the mode of production. The change in material reality brings about change in the nature and type of society. Some Marxists call it a science.

Dialectical materialism: It is the philosophy of Marxism. It consists of three laws of unity of opposites, transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa and the negation of negation.

Mode of production: It is the method of organizing production which has two components viz. forces of production and the social relations of production. The former includes capital, land, machines and instruments etc. including physical labour of the working class. The social relations of production refer to the nature and types of two dominant classes that characterize a given mode of production.

Money: A general equivalent form of value of commodities appearing as pure exchange value. In capitalism it takes the form of paper currency which is abstract.

Answer the following questions:

7.9 Exercise Questions :

1. Write a long essay on historical materialism.
2. What is historical materialism? Discuss the types of society Europe had witnessed.
3. What is mode of production? Write in detail about the capitalist mode of production.

Give short answers to the following questions:

1. Mode of production
2. Relations of production
3. Feudal society
4. Asiatic society
5. Dialectical materialism

7.10 Selected readings :

Marx, Karl and F. Engels (1969) *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

McLellan, David (1975) *Marx*. Fontana Modern Masters.

McLellan, David (1980) *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction*. Delhi: Macmillan.

Karl Marx**Social Classes and the class struggle****Structure :**

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Definition of Class
- 8.3 Types of Classes
- 8.4 Criteria for Social Classes
- 8.5 Class Struggle
- 8.6 Conclusion
- 8.7 Key Words
- 8.8 Exercise Questions
- 8.9 Selected Readings

8.0 Objectives :

The study of this lesson will enable you to :

- * define class
- * explain main types of Social Classes.
- * give details of the criteria on which social classes are based.
- * discuss the concept of class struggle as given by Karl Marx.

8.1 Introduction :

To understand the nature of a given society it is necessary to know the composition of social classes in that society and relations between them. But what constitutes a class? What are the features of a social class?

8.2 Definition of Social Class :

For Marx a very simple definition of class may be given in terms of the position of individuals in a given mode of production -as to who owns the means of production. The owners make one class and those who do not own make another class. The owners are powerful and rule the society, as the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. Those who have capital are called the

capitalists or the **bourgeoisie** and those who own land are called landlords. Engels, a friend and co-author of Marx describes the bourgeoisie as "the class of the great capitalists who, in all developed countries, are now almost exclusively in possession of all the means of consumption, and of the raw materials and instruments (machines, factories) necessary for their production." Marx says that this class has "substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation" for the earlier forms of exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions in earlier societies. He writes in the *Communist Manifesto*: The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

8.3 Types of Social Classes :

The non-owners of capital or land own physical labour and are called workers or the **proletariat**. They make another class. Marx pinned great hopes on this class and also said that the future belongs to them. In this class he saw the seeds of destruction of the capitalist system of production. He remarked in the *Communist Manifesto*: "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product."

Thus in the modern capitalist society we have three main classes of the **bourgeoisie**, the **landowners** and the **proletariat** who live on profit, rent and wages. But as the capital has become both dominant and determinant in the present society, the land owners are thrown to the back ground and only the antagonistic relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat matter. Marx was aware that in a modern capitalist society the class structure is not simple. There are numerous classes. **Middle class** is also very fat. But this class has no role to play in history hence it is not important to him. This class has no social concern as its members just cannot look beyond their noses. As a matter of fact this class is corrupted in the sense that it is interested in furthering its own ends which involve acquiring a new house, a bigger one, a new car and still bigger one, a new model TV and other gadgets used at home. These are the ingredients of this class' social status. That is why Marx calls this class as reactionary which is not only indifferent to revolution but against it. This class consists of the intelligentsia, the professionals, petty bourgeoisie etc.

Besides the middle class there is another class of the **lumpen proletariat** which is equally reactionary. Marx describes them as "a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, people without a hearth or a home." In other words they are the drop-outs of society who had no stake in the development of society and so no historical role to play.

In his book *The Class Struggles in France* Marx mentions as many as seven classes in the French society of the nineteenth century, but he believes that all classes are not important. Only those are significant who have the potential to play a historic role of bringing about a revolutionary change in society. Thus in capitalist society only two classes are important at the end - those who own capital and others who own labour power. They also represent the unity of opposites. Hence their relationship is dialectical. In the *Communist Manifesto* written in 1848, Marx writes: "Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."

8.4 Criteria for Social Classes :

For Marx a social class is based on both the **objective** and **subjective** criteria. By the former we mean that criterion which could be seen by all and which could be quantified clearly. For example, a capitalist owns ten factories, each having 100 machines and 5000 workers etc. And a landowner has 100 acres of land, three tractors, ten tube-wells and twenty workers etc. By the objective criteria we also mean the position of an individual in a given mode of production, that is, whether he owns means of production or not. By virtue of this very fact an individual belongs to the class of owners or non-owners. Marx calls this **class-in-itself**. Therefore all the workers in a factory belong to the class of workers or proletariat independent of their choice. The question of their political orientation or will is not an issue here just in the same manner as all students, male or female, young or old who have joined the college or university are students. The older among them do not qualify to be called as teachers or by some other name or designation. Similarly all those who perform the role of teaching are called teachers never mind what is their age or sex.

On the other hand we have **class-for-itself** that is based primarily on the subjective orientation of its members. By the subjective aspect we mean what do the members of a class think about themselves and their role in society. Thus this class-for-itself is formed within the larger class-in-itself. The former is characterized with consciousness of the working class. The

defining parameter is the element of consciousness. The members of the class-for-itself are not only conscious of this fact that they are the workers who do not own the means of production but they are also conscious of this fact that they are being exploited by the capitalists for the generation of profit. They are also aware of their rights due to them and more than that of the fact that they can obtain their rights only after a struggle. The capitalist is not going to deliver their rights to them on platter. Here in comes the question of the workers' political consciousness.

Marx used to say, it is the social existence that determines consciousness and not the consciousness that determines social existence. By this he meant that the real material conditions of existence make the thinking of individuals. What do they think and how? A prince will learn the ways of royalty and a poor man's child will learn the ways of poor people. That is why the life style, mannerism, language, dress etc. are shaped or moulded by the class one belongs to. This is an individual's social existence.

The **consciousness** refers to one's ways of feeling, acting and thinking. It involves the conditioning of a person's mind. It may be of two types -real or false. The real **consciousness** of a worker refers to his awareness of his social existence which means that he does not own the means of production, hence he cannot become rich and cannot come out of this poverty unless he struggles hard for it because the capitalist has so organized the production system that he would be given only subsistence wage such that he may live simply from hand to mouth. The real consciousness also means that the worker is conscious of the historic role Marx had assigned to the working class. Following the understanding developed from the materialist conception of history Marx argued that as the capitalist society is being increasingly divided into two hostile camps -bourgeoisie and proletariat- the latter must come together and join hands against the former. That is why he gave the famous slogan: "Workers of All Countries, Unite." This unity is for waging a war against the bourgeoisie for the liberation of the proletariat. This is the historic role that Marx had assigned to the working class for liberating the whole mankind. A worker who is really conscious of his social existence is also conscious of this historic role given to him.

Marx was aware that only a small section of the large working class would be initially conscious of their real existence. All others are given to **false consciousness** which means that the workers have an illusion about their life, their existence and their work. They do not appreciate that real cause of their poverty is not their bad luck or misfortunes of previous birth etc. but the organization of the production system which is so designed by the bourgeoisie as to give them more and more profit such that the poor remain poor and the rich keep becoming richer. The workers afflicted with false consciousness

always think that the bourgeoisie is a god fearing person who has given them employment. He is their *anna-data* hence they should leave no stone unturned to work for his factory and his prosperity. The workers are also reminded again and again by the bourgeoisie that he cares for their lot and tries his level best to help them in every possible way.

An illustration from the Hindi cinema would make it more clear. You must have seen in some Bollywood movie that when a young man (the hero) of the village having returned home from his college education tells his village people not to give their thumb impressions on blank papers or surrender their share of grain as interest etc. to the landlord and makes people rally after him, the landlord (Amrish Puri) uses every possible technique not to let the hero's dictates prevail. But when he fails, he sends his *lathhail -lathi* wielding goons- to put the village houses on fire. Later he (Amrish Puri) himself goes to the village people and consoles them for the *devi's prakop*, the curse of the devi and offers them blankets, utensils, clothes and food etc. He wants to show them that it was their bad luck, yet he has come to their rescue even if they were rebelling against him. The village people, including the members of the hero's family curse him rather than the landlord. This precisely is false consciousness.

The industrial workers or the proletariat gradually form the class-for-itself from within the class-in-itself. Their coming together in large factories under single roof has not only brought them together but also helped them gain consciousness of their real existence when they share with each other their day to day experience and question the organization of the production system. The agricultural workers or serfs to be precise working in the agricultural fields far apart from each other could not share their day to day experiences on a large scale hence they were god fearing. They were easily manipulated by the landlord that it was their bad luck only that was responsible for their suffering. But now when hundreds of workers are working under a single roof, they not only come together physically but also socially and politically by questioning the logic of their bad luck. Why they only are poor? Why they have the bad luck? Why all those who have bad luck have come together at one place? Why they are getting poor each day? Why the owner of the factory and their managers change three dresses in a day? Why do they grow rich and richer? All these questions have been made possible now when their living conditions grow from bad to worse. That is, the worsening working conditions will force the working class to reflect on the above mentioned vital questions pertaining to their social existence. Their material conditions will force them to raise such questions. Thus when the workers become really conscious of their social existence the class-for-itself starts consolidating itself against its adversaries, the bourgeoisie. This class begins the task of

arousing the real consciousness of the fellow workers who are still under the spell of false consciousness. Who still dare not think or work against the powers that be.

Such an activity on the part of the members of the class-for-itself will firstly instill doubts about the ideological manipulations of the bourgeoisie and then will draw them closer to their fellow workers who are engaged in sharpening the contradictions between the two antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This way more and more workers shall join the struggle launched by their fellow workers. It will result in the enlarging of the class-for-itself. Their struggle against the bourgeoisie also gets intensified accordingly. Now the two antagonistic classes stand opposed to each other.

Check your knowledge :

(1) Define Class.

(2) Name three classes of Modern Capitalist Society.

(3) For Marx what are the criteria of basis of Social Classes.

8.5 Class Struggle :

The class struggle thus begun will only have to be intensified to achieve the workers' goals. To begin with their goal is confined to the four walls of their own factory involving the improvement of their working conditions, rise in

their wages or some more welfare measures that the factory should implement. Gradually this struggle moves out of the bounds of the factory walls. Workers from other factories too join the struggle. It becomes more and more political in the sense that the intensified struggle is no longer confined to meet the demands raised in the first place -increase in wages or improvement of working conditions- but raising more fundamental issues of eradication of poverty, abuse of economic and natural resources, the nature of state or political authority etc.

The class struggle that has reached thus far must only march forward to achieve the cherished goal of establishing the workers' state. Marx had assigned this historic role to the proletariat who he said will lose nothing in this revolution but its chains. Such a proletarian revolution will not only emancipate the proletariat or the working class but the whole mankind. This revolution will establish a society without social classes of the rich and the poor, the workers and non-workers, the high and the low etc. The society will become classless. The revolution, either through the ballot or the bullet, is necessary as the new society is required to be raised on the new foundations. It will have new values and norms necessary for the creation of a new man who does not believe in inequality. Who neither exploits any body nor gets exploited from any one. Who enjoys freedom himself and does not encroach upon the freedom of others. Such a human being could be created only if we have thrown aside the culture of the old society which was basically meant to justify or legitimize the traditional inequalities. That is why revolutionary change is not only desirable but also necessary.

8.6 Conclusion :

We may conclude this lesson by saying that social classes are based on economic criteria of ownership of means of production. The material conditions will make workers conscious of their real existence. Then they will identify their enemy and wage a struggle against him not only for their own liberation but for the freedom of whole mankind.

8.7 Key words :

Class : All those who occupy same position in the mode of production make a class. It is primarily based on one's economic condition. It makes **class-in-itself**. This is the objective basis of class. When they become conscious of their real existence and also about the political goal of bringing about workers' revolution it becomes class-for-itself.

Class struggle: When the workers become conscious of their social existence they not only consolidate themselves but also draw lines between

them and their enemy and launch struggle against him.

Bourgeoisie: Those who own capital and do not work with their own hands. They own the means of production and continue to develop these progressively.

Proletariat: They sell their labour power to earn wages in cash.

Consciousness: It refers to one's ways of feeling, acting and thinking. It may be real or false depending upon a worker's understanding of his social existence. It is social existence that determines consciousness and not vice versa.

8.8 Exercise Questions :

1. Define class. Describe different classes in capitalist society.
2. What is consciousness? How does it become the basis of two types of classes in capitalist society?
3. Write a long note on class struggle.

Give short answers to the following questions:

- (a) Real consciousness
- (b) False consciousness
- (c) Lumpenproletariat
- (d) Class-in-itself
- (e) Class-for-itself

8.9 Selected readings :

Marx, Karl and F. Engels (1969) *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

McLellan, David (1975) *Marx*. Fontana Modern Masters.

McLellan, David (1980) *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction*. Delhi: Macmillan.

Max Weber Interpretative Sociology

Structure :

- 9.0 Objective
- 9.1 Life of Max Weber
- 9.2 Research Methodology
 - 9.2.1 Verstehen
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9.0 Objective :

To bring home Max Weber's method of research. His interpretative understanding above all.

9.1 Life of Max Weber :

Karl Emil Maximillian Weber, was born at Erfurt in East Germany in 1864. He was the son of an advocate, a leader of the national liberal party in Germany, and a prominent member of the erstwhile 'parliament' of his country. Many visitors - intellectuals and political leaders - used to come to their house. At the age of 29 Max Weber got his doctorate from the University of Berlin, and became a professor in the University of Freiburg. Later he moved

on to other universities. However, most of the time he remained in the University of Heidelberg. He was the live wire behind a number of voluntary scholarly associations. He visited several countries in Europe and America. Max Weber was a member of the constituent assembly for drafting the constitution of Germany after the first world war (1914-18). He was also an unsuccessful candidate for getting the sponsorship ticket of the liberal party for the presidency of his country. Weber was neither a leftist nor a rightist, but in between the two. His work shows that his own political orientation is right liberal. Weber suffered from pneumonia, and breathed his last at the age of 56, in 1920.

Max Weber was a highly intelligent person. He had systematic and thorough knowledge with varied detailed historical depth. He had a sharp intellect. His style is clear, uncomplicated, direct and lucid. However, he possessed an explosive temperament, and entered into unnecessary litigation towards the last years of his life.

9.2 Research Methodology

9.2.1 Verstehen :

This is a German word. It means interpretative understanding. Weber's methods of research have come out to be very useful. He has combined the methods of the natural and the cultural sciences. Natural sciences explain facts by finding out their causes. Cultural sciences understand the meanings of facts. To understand means looking at the course of action with a view to ascertaining its real meaning. This may neither be the conventional meaning, nor the objective meaning. It is the subjective meaning in the mind of the actor himself. Such a meaning can vary from person to person. This can be clarified through empathy between the actor and the researcher. While doing so, the researcher has to desist from projecting his own meaning on to the minds of the acting individuals. Weber's method of research involves grasping the facts from outside and interpretatively understanding from within, the inside story. Apart from using the method of *Verstehen*, meanings can be understood by constructing ideal types.

Now-a-days, in hindsight, we can say that *Verstehen (samjhna)* is a psychological process. It involves consciousness, concentration, intelligence, imagination, learning, motivation and so on. Understanding means that an observer meets those under observation on their own terms. He internalises the inner meanings by recognising the outer signs. Understanding creates a condition of mind for distinguishing between the subjective and the objective. The quality of one's subjective judgement plays a part in understanding. Perception is functionally selective. For a starving beggar, $2+2=4$ *rotian*. Some have eyes, so to say, while some others have no eyes. Some possess trained capacity for

comprehension, while others are marked by incapacity in this regard. Commonsense is not very common. To err is human. Intuition is not always reliable. Trained observation is required.

Erklaeren (*samjhauna*) is a logical process. It is a third person perspective. Explaining, clarification, description, saying with reasonable arguments what it signifies. This provides evidence for bringing the matter home to others. The researcher provides the reasons, or shows cause, why it is like that. One explains by grasping the context from outside, in terms of impersonal natural conditions. The researcher tells others about the matter by putting up precise evidence'. The conditions under which something can be taken as granted are specified.

While understanding from within, inside story, (*ander ki baat*) is a subjective process, explaining from outside is an objective process. Weber combines the two. Thus understanding and explanation are two complementary processes. In this way, the observer can take account of the meanings and motives in causal explanations. One's causal explanations are based on the socio-cultural conditions of existence under which certain forms of meaning can become effective.

Verstehen does not permit direct explanation and verification. It yields hypotheses for further testing. This technique is useful for getting feedback from the field under study in participant observation. It produces hypotheses for further testing. These have to be tested before formulating theories. *Verstehen* + *Erklaeren* take care of two different contexts, that of discovery and justification. At the outset, we translated the German word *Verstehen* as interpretative understanding. Interpretation means bringing out meanings that are not immediately obvious.

E.g. 1 : if X says that Y is a good man, this does not mean that Y is good, or for that matter, bad. The statement reveals that the attitude of X towards Y is favourable.

E.g. 2 : If a person says that every day is a Sunday, we cannot conclude that the remaining six days of the week have been abolished. We conclude that his attitude towards work is favourable. Hasty generalisation for concrete to abstract must be avoided.

E.g. 3 : If the sign-board says that sex-determination test is not done in a hospital, this does not necessarily mean that the test is not available, at least under the table. It means that the test is illegal and or is considered somehow improper, something to be kept concealed from others.

Emotion	Example
1. Apathy (<i>udaseenta</i>)	I don't care. <i>Koi mare koi jive, Suthra ghol patase peeve.</i>
2. Emotion (<i>bhavna</i>)	Feeling sad. <i>Tatta hanjhu shagan pa sanun, birha tali dharo.</i>
3. Emotional contagion	Catching others' emotions. (<i>sansaric bhavna</i>)
4. Empathy (<i>Samvedna</i>)	Sharing others' experience from within. The wearer knows where the shoe pinches Emotional resonance.
5. Pity (<i>daya</i>)	It seems you need help. <i>Abla jeevan hai tumhari yahi kahani, anchal mein hai doodh, aur ankhone mein pani.</i>
6. Sympathy (<i>sahanubuti</i>)	Love thy neighbour as thyself. Helpful attitude.
7. Telepathy (<i>dooranubuti</i>)	Reading somebody's mind, without being told about it.

Fig. 1 : Distinguishing empathy from what it is not.

E.g. 4 : While studying the social background of diabetes, replace Khatri and Arora castes with sedentary life style. Avoid conclusions that can give rise to stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

What is the point? Draw broad generalisations. Move over from concrete to abstract and from narrow to broad, broader, broadest. Replace proper nouns with the names of relevant variables underlying a set of conditions giving rise to the problem under study.

Sociology has made rapid strides after the second world war. However, so far perhaps nobody has done as much for the subject as Max Weber. In order to understand contemporary sociology, one has to acquaint oneself with Max Weber's contributions.

9.2.2 Ideal Types :

Ideal types are used for finding out the meanings as well as causes of social facts. These are also used for comparing complex events or processes. For constructing ideal types, one has to define certain salient features of the

situation as essential. These are brought out, accentuated, exaggerated, maximised. The remaining aspects are understated, minimised, left out of view for the time being. These ideas are used to construct word pictures or to abstract models. These models are based neither on averages nor on proportions. These are not exact replicas or photographs. They indicate limits. They are like cartoons. We can construct a number of different ideal types of the same phenomenon. All of them are correct.

While constructing ideal types, we take care that there are sufficient reasons for their being possible in actual life situations. An ideal type is neither true nor false. It is pure. It is clear. It is a hypothetical construct, to be used for understanding the reality. Ideal types are constructed for use from time to time, depending upon the purpose in hand. Then these are kept aside. May be we can find some use for them later on too. They help us to bring home a point. Ideal types are tools for gaining knowledge. By themselves alone they are not knowledge. Empirical reality appears in mixed forms. Pure forms are rare.

For instance, let us take up Weber's ideal type of the 'spirit of capitalism' for consideration. He included the following elements in it: freedom of occupation, profit motive, accountability, rational enterprise, and organised markets, among others. Individuals are units of production in this model, not families. Weber knowingly excluded usury, adventurism and colonial exploitation from this ideal type. Weber's capitalism is a rational means for earning profit in a disciplined way. We will discuss soon hereunder how Weber used ideal types of the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism for understanding and explaining the process of social change.

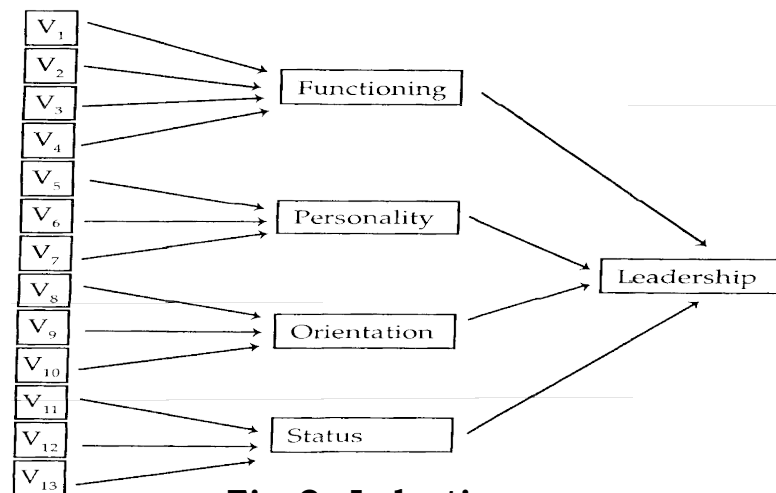


Fig. 2 : Induction

Check your knowledge :

- Q. 1 Why should we be interested in Max Weber, when we have our own Tagore, Nehru, M.N. Roy and Khushwant Singh ?

- Q. 2 Clarify the concept of empathy, giving examples.

- Q. 3 Which elements did Weber include in his ideal type of Protestantism ?

9.2.3 Value-freedom or Neutrality :

In the interest of rational understanding, Weber's sociology keeps values apart from social facts.

What is a value ? Value is that which is set down as somehow desirable or worthy of being followed, in disregard of whether we go after it or not. Beliefs regarding truth, beauty, wealth, honour, prestige, have values attached to them. Values are based upon beliefs, not rationality. Clashes for choosing between different values, and between what is valuable and what is not, go on from time to time in societies and in the minds of individuals for choice between alternatives. Values are what people acknowledge as precious.

Weber favoured value-freedom. He exhorts sociologists to keep their roles as scholars and as citizens apart from each other. That they would not think in a prejudiced manner. They would not thrust their own values on the categories of thought of the people being studied by them. With his emphasis on value-freedom, Weber wanted to make sociology a science indeed.

Science and ethics differ from each other insofar as science does not praise or condemn anybody. Science does take into consideration our motivation and our ability. But it does not lay down for us what we should do. Science looks for the course and causes of reality without arbitrariness. Values may be based on non-rational beliefs. Weber clearly saw values as separate from scientific facts. He highlighted that science deals with *what is*. It does not deal with *what ought to be*. Weber's doctrine of value-freedom does not mean

that a scientific researcher may give up values from his own conduct. On the contrary, he stressed that values are windows of understanding of human society. The social act does not become intelligible until and unless we understand values. Value-freedom involves keeping our own values aside while studying society and culture. What are the meanings that the people under study themselves attach to their actions? How do they themselves interpret their own actions? These questions can be answered only when the researcher exercises value-neutrality. While doing research, a researcher has to be impartial. The people under study cannot be understood without taking their own categories of thought, their own nets of signification, into consideration. While doing so, the researcher must look at the facts of observation without superimposing his own values on them. He has to study them in terms of their points of view, not his own.

Question 4 : Weberian scholars assert that bias, ideology, preconceptions, prejudice, deflect our observation and understanding, just like a straw, or even a beam, in our eyes. They are in favour of value-neutrality. Marxists deny that it is possible for us to proceed in this way. They look at society and history with their declared partisan attitude in favour of the working class. It is our being that determines the consciousness, they say. We can not be value-neutral. It is not the consciousness that determines the being. Value-freedom is a myth that hides an ideology. What do you say? Take side in this controversy, without using a restricted linguistic code (*ghasunn*).

9.2.4 Explanations :

Let us now try to understand what is an explanation. An explanation is different from understanding or discovering. Discoveries and justifications belong to different contexts. The context of discovery is based on imagination or inspiration. It is more than mere guess-work. Here we intuitively come to think of an appropriate solution for the problem under study. Our mind wanders here and there. We dream. We freely associate things with other things. We try to think of meaningful patterns underlying a process. To discover means to grasp and understand, or to represent the matter to oneself. One gets an idea. One comprehends something without expressing it, getting angry, or telling others about it. Such knowledge is directly experienced. It involves understanding as a psychological process. It generates hypotheses.

On the other hand, to explain means to make plain or intelligible, to unfold and illustrate the meaning, to expound or to account for something, or to clear it from obscurity. We clarify it in such a way that others understand it. Explanations are based on reasoned elaboration of experience. Such knowledge can be communicated to others. We call for explanation in the context of

justification. We develop criteria for inter-subjectively verifying the matter. Thus different persons using that procedure will arrive at the same conclusions. We present valid proof, evidence, logical arguments. We perform demonstrative experiments. We make others accept our findings without any doubt. Explanation is a logical operation. We demonstrate the truth of the premises, as well as the validity of the argument. Even if the justification is not enough, it does not mean that the conclusion is false. In that case, we provide another justification for the same conclusion.

The point is that it is not one and the same thing to understand the matter oneself, and to explain it to others. These are two different operations. We come to know of something in the context of discovery. In the context of explanation, or justification, or presentation, we communicate it to others.

An explanation answers the question : How ? Or Why ? It clears up obscure matters by upholding and illustrating them. It makes them plain. The matter becomes understandable. We untangle chaos and the links. We organise our findings in a meaningful way. Facts follow logically from it.

An Explanation consists of two parts. That to be explained is called *Explanandum*. That which explains is called *Explanans*.

A scientific explanation must be relevant, true and general. Relevance pertains to cogency, pertinence or suitability. Truth refers to neither being false nor half true. Generality means its applicability to a broad range of cases. It is not limited to a specific instance. A scientist does not dogmatically stick to an explanation. There is always some scope for improvement. He does not defend an explanation on the basis of old habits, revelation or authority. A scientific explanation is based on proper

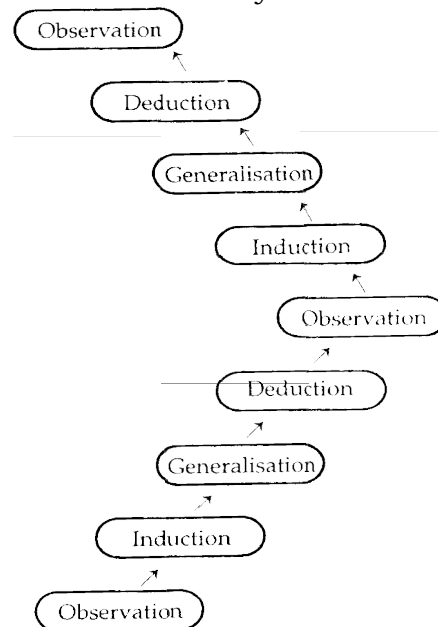


Fig. 3 : Induction and Deduction

clarifications and adequate evidence. Therefore, it is stated in such a way that it can be critically tested and systematically verified. A scientific explanation is even more acceptable if it is simpler (more natural), possesses considerable predictive power, and is compatible with previous well-established explanations.

9.2.4.1 Types of Explanation :

We may divide explanations into three types:

- (1) *Descriptive explanations* give an account of the procedures or structures. They state various criteria, facts, purposes, steps. For example:
 - i) Explaining the structure of a university.
 - ii) Describing how peasants adopt agricultural innovations.
- (2) *Interpretative explanations* clarify the meanings of certain terms. They tell us in what sense they are being used. For example:
 - i) Defining acculturation, cultural reproduction, or organisational effectiveness.
 - ii) To *explain away* means to modify the force of an argument by tilting or distorting facts.
- (3) *Reason-giving explanations* account for why something leads to something else. For example:
 - i) Why are there ethnic tensions in so many parts of the world ?
 - ii) Show cause why action should not be taken against you for absence from duty without leave.

Nagel's four-fold typology of explanations is discussed hereunder.

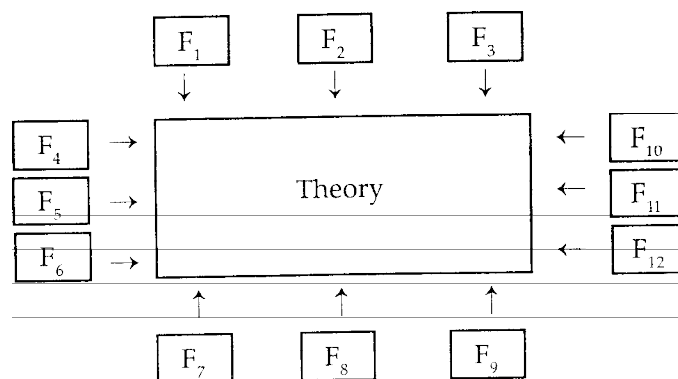


Fig. 4 : Induction

9.2.5 Induction and Deduction :

These are two types of explanation. As already discussed, to explain is to clarify, to say what it is all about, to point out the reasons for something. It helps us to put our findings in a proper way. An explanation may describe a process, interpret its meaning, or show cause why it is like that. First of all, we have to understand the matter ourselves. After that we have to explain it to others. Scientific explanation can be given in four different ways. These are discussed below.

9.2.5.1 Genetic explanation : This explains the present-day events, and what is going to happen in future, in terms of the chain of events in the past. This may be done by narrating a story about how something started, or by finding out the historical events that gave rise to it. For example W.H. Morgan (1818-81) classified the evolution of human society in three stages: savagery, barbarism and civilisation. Similarly, depending upon the ever-widening exclusion of blood relatives from marriage, F. Engels (1820-95) identified the following five stages of evolution of marriage and family : promiscuity, consanguinal family, punnaluan family, pairing family, and monogamy. One more example : G.H. Hutton has discussed various theories of the origin of the caste system in India in the traditional magical and religious beliefs, occupational distinction, race and colour, etc. All these instances show that the present has been explained in terms of the past. All these are genetic explanations. *Criticism* : Do not impose your own present-day standards on the past, or on other cultures.

9.2.5.2 Structural-functional explanation : It explores in detail the inter-connection between the various parts of a system or a package of practices and draws conclusions about what they do for one another, how they fulfil each other's needs. These are explained in terms of each other. It offers plausible rationales about elements doing something useful for a given totality. Such rationales are flexible, not rigid. A structural-functional explanation is not a causal explanation. Infact, what is a cause for one purpose may be an effect for another purpose. *Criticism* : Do not confuse the objective with the desirable.

For example, Davis and Moore's explanation of social stratification, of incentives for occupying positions for performing socially useful tasks. Deprivation in the past, with a view to acquiring the required qualifications, justifies gratification later on.

9.2.5.3 Inductive explanation : The task of induction is to find unity in diversity. It brings together important points under a common name. Induction proceeds from particular or single observed instances to general or universal conclusions. It abstracts concepts and makes generalisations. This is done by

observing specific instances and then summing up the results. The specifics meet in a comprehensive all-engulfing generality. The basic unity of an entity holds it together in diversity. Induction may suffer from defects like mal-observation and non-observation. We fail to perceive properly. We seem to observe without having observed.

Induction can proceed in various ways. We can intuitively try to find similarities in the known instances of a phenomenon. We can even undertake, where possible, exhaustive enumeration or summation of all the elements in a class. However, this is not always possible. In that case, we have to be satisfied with something less. We do induction by simple or incomplete enumeration. We do this when we can reasonably assume without complete enumeration that in general something can be accepted as true on the basis of repeated similarities of experience. It is expected that the remaining cases would also be the same. We resort to such a procedure when it is not possible to count all the cases. Uniformity of nature is assumed. It is taken for granted that the unobserved instances; and the conditions in which they exist, are like the observed ones. When this is so, even a representative sample of the population can be taken for study.

If the universe is homogeneous, the study of even a single case would be enough for drawing inductive inference. In case the universe is large or unlimited, exhaustive enumeration is not possible. Then we make probabilistic conclusions, hoping all the time that somehow or the other, the known cases are like the unknown ones. Induction can also be done by comparing the observed instances in analogous situations elsewhere, and giving them a common name. However, we have to avoid over-generalisation beyond what is justified by the underlying data. We have also to avoid jumping to conclusions on the basis of incomplete evidence.

Induction is not a perfect method. It cannot guarantee the truth of its results. These can be falsified even with a single negative observation. This point can be aptly illustrated with a story from Bertrand Russell. Once upon a time, there was a turkey. He found that on the first day at the turkey farm, and on all the subsequent days, he was fed at 8 a.m. He made these observations under a variety of circumstances: days of the week, months and seasons. Thereafter, he inductively arrived at the conclusion that he is invariably fed at 8 a.m. However, on a day before Christmas, instead of being fed, his throat was cut. Consequently, his inductive career came to a sudden end! The point is that even an inductive inference with true premises can lead to false conclusions. Induction can be erroneous. However, without being skeptical, often we can reasonably assume that there is sufficient reason to believe something. Then we go ahead and generalise.

9.2.5.4 Deductive explanation : Induction proceeds from facts to theory. Deduction goes from theory to facts. Deduction is the process of drawing valid inferences from a given theory or hypothesis. It infers from premises or propositions representing the already known facts. Let us keep four points in view. Conclusions flow from the premises. There is complete internal consistency. We are working with a closed system. All the relevant circumstances are before us, or are implied in the premises.

A deductive explanation begins with a general statement and draws out its consequences for particular instances. Let us take some examples into consideration:

- (1) All bees are hard-working.
Maya is a bee.
∴ Maya is hard-working.
- (2) If a country exercises surplus repression on its people, it is economically under-developed.
Country C₁ exercises surplus repression on its people.
∴ Country C₁ is economically under-developed.

Unlike induction, which involves a lot of creative thinking, deduction is a rigorous logical procedure. The inference is contained in the premises. The conclusion flows from the premises. In case the premises are true, the inference would also be true. However, logic does not guarantee the truth or falsity of premises. These are assumed. These assumptions are verified empirically. For this purpose, observation, survey, experimentation, and other methods are made use of. Such a procedure is by no means automatic or mechanical. Right decisions have to be made. For instance, let us take 'horned syllogism'. Here, one has to accept one of the two alternative propositions. Each of these is inconsistent with the original contention. Both the courses are undesirable. The victim is in a predicament. Both the choices are tricky. Such predicaments have to be resolved in time. Practice makes a man perfect.

Biologists often make use of the inductive method. Mathematicians often use the deductive method. Induction and deduction can also be combined together in an argument. Observe. Generalise, proceeding inductively from particular instances to a general statement about them. Move back from the general to its particular instances. Thus, check up your generalisations by confronting them with particular facts. Inductive and deductive instances can be checked up with each other by shuttling back and forth between the two types of arguments.

9.3 Conclusion :

Let us call it a day and finish here by referring back to the start of this

Lesson. Sociology deals with the present, while history deals with the past. Social scientists try to interpret the available evidence by asking themselves how it must really have happened. Other researchers, places and times, other findings. We cannot explain the past in terms of the present-day standards. What is good for the cow need not be so far the calf. Other people cannot be properly understood by imposing our own standards on their ways of thinking, feeling and acting. They have to be sufficiently scientifically understood and explained in terms of their own nets of signification. Weberians try to be as dispassionate as humanly possible. Objectivity is a laudable goal. In practice, it boils down to inter-subjectivity.

9.4 Exercise Questions :

- Q. 1 What do you mean by Verstehen?
- Q. 2 Explain the concept of Ideal Type.
- Q. 3 Write a note on Weber's value-freedom.
- Q.4 What is an Interpretative Explanation?

9.5 Suggested Readings :

- 1. Boudon, R. : *The Logic of Sociological Explanations*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974.
- 2. Koenig, Rene' : *Handbuch der Empirischen Sozialforschung*, Ferdinand Enke Verlag, Stuttgart, 1967.
- 3. Singh, Jaspal : *Methodology and Techniques of Social Research*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2001.
- 4. Weber, Max : *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, JCB Mohr, Tuebingen, 1976.

Social Action : Meaning and Types

Structure :

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Meaning and Sociology of Social Action
- 10.2 Types of Social Action
 - 10.2.1 Traditional Action
 - 10.2.2 Emotional Action
 - 10.2.3 Value-rational Action
 - 10.2.4 Purpose-rational Action
- 10.3 Rational Action
- 10.4 Conclusion
- 10.5 Exercise Questions
- 10.6 Suggested Readings

10.0 Objectives :

After going through this lesson you will be able to

- * define Social Action.
- * explain the types of Social Action.
- * give details of Rational Action.

10.1 Meaning and Sociology of Social Action :

Max Weber's sociology is a science. It interpretatively understands the meanings of social action with a view to explaining their causes, and making generalisations about their nature and types. The search for meaning follows the method of science. The observer's personal motivation, expectations and aspirations distort the meaning, unless he is properly trained and careful enough to separate and keep apart *what is* from *what should be*.

What is social action? Action is social in as much as the subjective meaning of the acting individual is attached to his action. There is no action without motivation. When an actor takes note of the activities of others, assigns meanings to them and then thinks, says or does anything, we call it social

action.

Overtly or covertly doing something or not doing it, being reluctant, reticent or tolerant, can be social action. Such action may be oriented to the past, present, or expected future action of known or unknown others. E.g. lack of confidence, resentment, revenge, hatred, friendship, partnership, are social actions. Every action is not social. Our handling of lifeless objects is not social action. Transcendental meditation is not social action. Social action is oriented towards the actions of other individuals. E.g. making faces before a mirror in the privacy of the bathroom is not a social act. But when a passenger gooses an airhostess, who gives him a dirty look before he backs off, we have social action. Similarly, the physical collision of two trucks is not social action. But when one man's truck wilfully follows a course of collision against another's in order to teach the latter a lesson, this is very much a social action. Strike by truck drivers against harassment by tax-men is a social action.

Once more. Men come together to survive. They go on living together in communities in order to lead good lives. They act, interact, enter into friendly and hostile relationships. They evolve procedures, institutions, for forming teams. Society brings out their potential for playing the game in the spirit of the game, to everybody's advantage. They learn to keep proper, neither more nor less, distance from each other. Just like a group of rodents with spikes (porcupines, *seh*), huddling together in a burrow during a long wintry night. Without good manners, norms and culture, social life is intolerable and even impossible. One acts for all and all act for one. Cultural poverty brings down the quality of life, while cultural capital facilitates it. Action includes restricted or elaborate physical action, sweet or harsh speech, written words, and so on. Keeping an exercise book between yourself and a fellow passenger in a bus, is social action. Whistling to attract somebody's attention is social action. Putting your signatures on a marriage contract is very much a social action. It may bound you to somebody for the rest of your life. So are considerations of higher and lower status. E.g. a lover and a beloved may shout and tell everybody that they are in love with each other. They promise a rose garden to each other. However, there is rain and storm sometime. Sometimes, they may have to conceal from others for the time being that this is so. But love is a pod of garlic. Its smell will come out sooner or later. The need for having to conceal from others is also social action. Just as inverse inference is also an inference, unsocial action is also social action. The point is that action is social insofar as it takes account of others and is oriented in its course accordingly. Loners and outliers cannot lead a good life over a long period of time.

10.2 Types of Social Action :

Depending upon the extent of rationality, Weber divided social action into four types. In actual situations, social action is not so unidimensional. Its various types are often mixed up. But such a classification is useful for analytical purposes. What are the four types of social action?

10.2.1 Traditional Action : In such action, the goals and means are chosen according to time-honoured ways of doing things. One acts according to habit in the way it has always been. E.g. a Punjabi groom invariably rides a mare. Sikhs are used to remaining unshorn. A daughter-in-law covers up her head in the presence of her father-in-law.

10.2.2 Emotional Action : In such action, goals and means are chosen according to feelings and sentiments. E.g. spontaneous excitement, smile, love, anger, jealousy, suspicion, pride, etc. The affection of a mother for her child is an emotional action.

10.2.3 Value Oriented Rational Action : One chooses appropriate means for reaching the desired objects. One accepts something as true, beautiful, right, ideal, correct. He sets about to achieve it, together with others like himself. The values are chosen without taking their consequences into consideration. He may not hesitate to even lay down his life for a cause. Such action is value-rational. Ethical standards are value-rational. This type of action is also called as *wertrational* action which means evaluatively rational action.

10.2.4 Goal or Purpose-Rational Action : It is also called instrumental action. Recognising realities and then selecting one out of the many available courses of action on the basis of practicable sound reasoning. Proper calculation precedes the choice between various alternatives. We apply our mind, weigh the pros and cons and then decide to do something rather than anything else. E.g. a trader buys and sells buffaloes with a view to making some money for himself. A father chooses a bride for his son with a view to building up a new political alliance. An industrial worker takes up a job in order to earn money, which he uses for financing consumption. An overseer constructs a bridge across a rivulet.

These are pure types. Goals can never be rational. But the means are rationally calculated. Our actions are hardly ever fully purpose rational. These actions can be said as *zweckrational* actions which means purely purposive and instrumental action.

Type	Features
Traditional	Habitual
Emotional	Feelings + reactions
Value-rational	Unconditional means + calculated ends
Instrumental	Both ends + means are calculated

Fig. 1 : Types of Social Action

Check your knowledge :

Q. 1 The rain in Spain is mainly in the plains. Is it social action ?

Q. 2 "I beg your pardon. I never promised you a rose garden. There is thunder and storm sometime." Can this be classified as social action?

Q. 3 There is no scientific evidence of any man-made bridge between India and Sri Lanka. But some people believe in the existence of Ram Setu there. How does a sociologist resolve this issue?

Q. 4 Distinguish between value-rational (*Wertrational*) and purpose-rational (*Zweckrational*) social action, giving one or two examples.

Rationality, based on due calculation and rational proof, is a central concern in Weber's work. He favoured rationalisation of social life. For him it included market economy, bureaucratic authority, and civil private law.

With thoughtful and systematic procedures, rationalisation induces radical transformation (Change is an ongoing process. Transformation is its completion) in all spheres of social life. His dispassionate studies in history bring out the irrationality of traditional and emotional structures. Weber showed that economic reason and religious ethics are linked together. The western and eastern religions differ from each other in terms of rationality

(e.g. denying supernatural revelations by some voice from heaven). A modicum of rationalisation is a pre-condition for the rise of capitalism. The east fails to get ahead, because it remains shackled by traditions and emotions. Let us clarify these concepts in detail. First of all we will distinguish between three types of social action.

10.3 Rational Action :

Let us try to understand what rational action is by distinguishing it from what it is not. It is different from traditional action. In this case, customs, heritage, usage define what is to be done and what is not to be done. We go on thinking, feeling and acting in the same old way.

Example 1 : We remove our shoes and cover our heads before entering a temple. This is customary. Every year, on the concluding day of Mela Minjar in Chamba, blossoms and tassels of maize, along with dry coconut fruit, are ritually immersed in the river Ravi. This is traditional action. Sikhs remain unshorn. This is their heritage. Some castes are treated as untouchables. This has been going on since times immemorial, justifications have been given for untouchability. But there is no real reason for it. This is traditional. Rational action is also different from emotional action. Feelings like anger, dejection, hope, irritation, jealousy, love, surprise, fall under this category.

Example 2 : A rampaging mob in Bombay passionately protesting against the death of their leader, vandalises and sets ablaze a hospital. Emotionally charged unarmed slogan-shouting protesters contemptuously flaunting their chappals at gun-totting soldiers safely perched on a large war tank. Mujahideen fighting in Kashmir and Chechenya driven by romantic notions. Smugglers or other adventurers spurning day-to-day comforts. Roadside Romeos teasing girls in street corners. Their actions are based on irrational emotions.

Rationalism is a point of view which emphasizes primacy of reason in our search for proper ways of doing things. Rational action is based on intellectual insight and logically valid reasoning, due calculation, transparency and sufficiently reasonable proof. We use efficient means for achieving the desired goals. Decisions are made on the basis of expected, costs and benefits in terms of realistic priorities.

Example 3 : Reproductive behaviour is rationalised by using contraceptives for birth control, or giving up their use as and when desired. The number of child-births is limited according to one's flexible needs and free will. Thus age at marriage becomes meaningless for family planning and populations size.

Example 4 : There is no harm in adding some more examples here. Research on political socialisation improves the theoretical basis for political action,

and consolidates the state. A policy-maker foresees problems and provides for their solutions in advance. Similarly, a manager accepts the challenge to his ability to compete. He stretches himself up to the breaking point in pursuit of gratification. Many more examples can be given. Offering fewer alternative dishes in a restaurant raises the sale of that day's special offer. Lower pro rate costs raise profitability. Rationalisation increases input-output ratio.

Real life situations hardly ever fall clearly under one of these types (traditional, emotional and rational). We act under :

Pros	Cons
Alienation	Altruism
Lack of Time	Curiosity
Privacy	Habit
Mistrust	Loneliness
Tired of Salesmen	Prestige
	Cash rewards
Unwillingness	Willingness

Fig. 2 : To be interviewed, or not to be interviewed? Weigh the pros and cons with a diagram. Then decide.

Example 5 : Mercury, the mythical god of merchants, is known as Hermes in Greece. He is well-versed in many languages, and performs hermeneutic (interpretative) functions. He knows the winds, the ways, places far and wide. He easily establishes contacts, interacts, and builds up relationships. He does not discriminate between good and bad. To get something, by hook or crook, by fair or foul, is well and proper for him. Not to get is to regret. Under his influence, those who act on his advice become prosperous. Aristocratic despotism gives way to capitalist hegemony. Liberal democracy becomes the dominant political mode. Those who give the best performance become the elites. Rates of social change as well as territorial and social mobility go up. Size of the middle class becomes large. Mercury removes hurdles in the way of rationalisation of economy and society. He opens up the world for trade and commerce.

Technically, rationalisation introduces compatible norms and standards. This brings in mechanisation, assembly lines and automation in the process of production. The process of work is reorganised. Fewer workers produce more. Working hours become smaller. These become flexible, even though work becomes intensive. Conditions at the place of work become humane.

Example 6 : Let us take the example of just-in-time (J.I.T.) Manufacture, Plan, Control, Minimise the salary bill by bringing down the number of employees, while increasing their speed and efficiency. Downsize the inventory (stock), while making the right components available at the right place in right time. Improve quality, Cut costs, Deliver the goods ordered by customers according to schedule. JIT improves sale-ability and competitive performance. Coming to the social aspect, rationalisation replaces use of physical force with rule of law. It broadens loyalties. It transforms relations between men, other men, and machines. Individuals become more important than the relations between individuals. Matters of fact over rule customs and feelings. Utility take over the place of mutual obligations. Contract (terms of agreement) replaces status (continuous cooperation). Secular (this worldly) replaces sacred (spiritual). Achievement/orientation (competent performance) becomes more important than the needs for affiliation (attachment) and power (political capacity). Allocation of resources as well as sectional alliances and loyalties get readjusted.

Example 7 : Budgets of research organisations like BARC, CSIR, DRDO and ISRO exceed the total expenditure of almost all the 300 universities in India. Universities do not have enough money to build up the required infrastructure (laboratories, libraries, archives). Research institutes do not have a good age-mix. Their resources are under-utilised. Rationalisation implies opening up the former's infrastructure for use by young men and women from universities and colleges. This would mean rational utilisation of resources for scientific research.

Age of reason emerges during the course of cultural development. Spread of knowledge pushes it forward. A knowledge society is a rational society. It erodes the outdated structures of domination, and alters the material logic.

We can rationally choose the means for going somewhere. But logical reasoning does not tell us in which direction to go. Capitalism and socialism are two of the different directions in which we can proceed rationally. In a society following the capitalistic path of development, rationalisation starts with business and industry. Gradually, habits acquired at the place of work spill over to and penetrate the entire social life : Family, kinship, community, and other social structures. Those who make use of the opportunities opened up by the transformation, become upwardly mobile and others go down.

10.4 Conclusions :

What is it in the western culture that produces the wealth of nations? Rationalisation of various aspects of social life. Promotion of this process can do the same for the eastern world. This implies : Do not whine and beg an *avtar* (*Mere ghar nahin atta loon ke bansari waliara! Meri patee hoi patloon ke bansari walaria!*) or a messiah to take pity on you and solve your problems. Help

yourself. If it is torn, you mend it what should *avatar* do there? Reacting with panic or going berserk makes a situation worse confounded. Do not get angry. Understand with a cool head. Human brain has vast potential. Think, Act, Effectively utilise the available resources, for sustainable development.

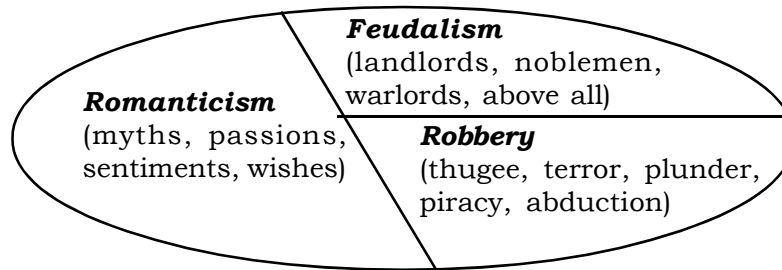


Fig. 3 : Feudal-Robber-Romanticism

Speed of this operation depends upon a higher level of consciousness and cumulative maturity of the total socio-cultural phenomenon, judged in terms of what is going on around (feudal robber romanticism, politics of passion), we will have to muddle through for a long time to come.

10.5 Exercise questions :

Q. 5 A young man comes to a city, to live a good life. He finds a need and fulfils it. He invests his earnings to make more money. Thereby he asserts his existence. How would you classify this type of social action?

Q. 6 Weber endorsed Hegel's conceptualisation of politics in India as feudal-robber-romanticism. Would you classify it as traditional, or affective, or value-rational, or instrumental action? Why? (150 words answer).

10.6 Suggested Readings :

1. Singh, Jaspal : *Rationalisation of Social Life*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2003.
2. _____: *Society, Culture and Socio-Cultural Change*, National, New Delhi, 1996.
3. Weber, Max : *Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft*, JCB Mohr, Tuebingen, 1976.

Authority : Meaning and Types

Structure :

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Meaning of Authority
 - 11.1.1 Legitimate Order
- 11.2 Types of Authority
 - 11.2.1 Traditional Authority
 - 11.2.2 Charismatic Authority
 - 11.2.2.1 Routinisation of Charisma
 - 11.2.3 Rational Legal Authority
- 11.3 Elements of Authority
- 11.4 Conclusion
- 11.5 Exercise Questions
- 11.6 Suggested Readings

11.0 Objectives :

Clarification of the concept of authority. Classification of the concept into basic types. Special attention to the ins and outs of the bureaucratic authority. Rationalisation of social life is the goal of liberal-democratic sociology. What does it mean? We will clarify that concept in this Lesson.

11.1 Meaning of Authority :

Weber's concept of authority is built upon his typology of social action. Max Weber used the word 'Herrschaft' which has been translated by sociologists in terms as 'authority', as 'domination' or command. 'Herrschaft' is a situation in which a 'Herr' means master dominates or commands others. It is his ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him.

Power means somehow the ability to get things done the way one wants, in spite of opposition from the relevant others. Power can be legitimate or illegitimate.

Authority is regulated and legitimised power. Those subject to such domination would probably willingly submit to it. However, in order to increase such probability, the person in authority needs some helpers to enforce his orders. Others can be won over for this purpose with physical force, material rewards, emotional attachment, or appeal to custom. A purely material relation cannot be strong and enduring. In order to be accepted, legitimacy of the order has to be kept in mind. In order to convince others, and themselves, about their suitability, those in authority build up and circulate myths about themselves. They also surround themselves with symbols of authority.

11.1.1 Legitimate order : Max Weber says that only those orders are legitimate which the persons subject to authority are going to accept willingly. Social action is based upon belief in the legitimacy of the order. Orders can be got accepted on a regular basis only if they are believed to be legitimate according to tradition, or the recognition of a charismatic leader, or on the basis of their rationality.

11.2 Types of Authority :

Weber's threefold typology of authority is based on his classification of types of social action. Every order puts forth claims to its being somehow legitimate. Depending upon their claim to legitimacy, availability of followers and intensity of following, there are three types of legitimate authority. These are discussed hereunder in detail, one by one.

11.2.1 Traditional authority : Such authority is based on the traditional privileges and prerogatives being sacrosanct, and the orders of those exercising such authority being perfect in a moral sense. What has always been there since times immemorial is respected, because it has been like that. Old conventions and precedents are followed. Orders of persons in authority are obeyed. Traditions permit a master a lot of leeway for wilful acts. The master is merciful to some persons. He cold-shoulders others without provoking them to offer resistance. But by over-stepping the limits laid down by traditions, the master can jeopardise his own authority. Eventual resistance is not directed against the system. It is directed against the person of those who deviate from the traditions.

The ruler is personally the master. His servants are faithful to him. They are recruited from amongst relatives, slaves, clients and personal favourites. They are not recruited on contract. Jobs are not given on the basis of competence or qualifications. The hierarchy of henchmen or disciples is not rationally fixed. They are seldom paid a fixed salary in cash at regular intervals. They are fed from the kitchen of the master. They have to compete with each other for *ad hoc* favours from the master like land tenure, or a gold bracelet, or a woollen shawl. Favours may be given in kind in the form of a share in

plunder or gifts or donations, in return for services done.

The cost of weapons, or other equipment and tools, is to be met out of the above. No separate charges are made for these things.

The authority of a feudal lord (*Jagirdar, Samant*) for instance, is traditional in nature. The king bestows landed and other property upon a feudal lord, in return for military or administrative services and promise of subservience in future. The feudal lord may pass on a part of the land to his vassals on similar terms and conditions. The tenants have to give a share in the harvest to the owner of land. They are not owners. The tenancy can be further passed on to their sons and grandsons only after getting permission from above. The lord has a modicum of disciplinary powers over his tenants. In case of breach of trust, he can ask them to give his land back. They are not owners. They are only in possession. It is not a matter of trade and commerce. It is a matter of mutual relations and faith. The tenant has no rights except those recognised as such by the lord. The lords seldom enter into direct day-to-day confrontation with each other. They induce their tenants to play their game.

The traditional authority is bound by irrational considerations. There is not to reason: why? They go on doing things in the-same old way. Those in authority are restricted by grace, prejudice, emotional bonds and informal relations, from acting in a rational manner. It is a matter of honour for them to act that way.

11.2.2 Charismatic authority: Charisma is a Greek word. It means gift of grace, or inspiration. It rests on the sacred or heroic or exemplary character of somebody bestowed with supernatural powers.

Charismatic authority is based on recognition of a person's energy, bravery, purity, ecstasy, magic, knowledge, vision, wisdom, character, and other qualities. Such a person is a lucid speaker. He fervently believes in his cause. He does not care for anybody. Prophets, shamans, *darwesh*, expert hunters, demagogues, miraculous healers, fall under this category. Mohammed, Banda Bahadur, Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Hitler, Gandhi, Sai Baba, Saddam Husain, are examples of charismatic leaders. Such persons are natural leaders in hard times.

Why do people follow such a person? With a view to getting some benefit out of him. To save themselves from his wrath. It is believed that he can change their fate. When he comes, darkness turns into light. His followers believe that he possesses supernatural powers. Thus he can work wonders. It is believed that he can prevent disasters, and lead his people to greatness. Does he actually possess such powers? This is a matter of belief. His followers have faith in the supernatural powers at his back, not in him as such. Such a medium is believed to be stronger than even the powers behind him, because

he can circumvent those powers. A charismatic leader asks the people to follow him, in the name of his backers. Reminding them of their being duty-bound to follow him, he asks them to rise up, free themselves of their earlier shackles, and do as directed by him. People do try to test his charisma, from time to time. But he himself asserts that his mission is free of such verification. People follow him in the hope of solving their chronic problems, expecting that he, would lead them out of their conflicts and hopelessness. The charismatic leader's followers belonging to his inner circle spread myths about his miraculous powers. He then exercises his leadership with their active support.

When a charismatic leader remains unsuccessful over a period of time, and his lead does not help his followers, it is believed that the supernatural power behind him has withdrawn its support. This deprives him of his charisma. His followers desert him.

Charisma is a revolutionary force. The charismatic leader creates new values and norms, away from what has always been. He shows new avenues, claiming: "It is written like that. But I tell you..." Charismatic leaders do not calculate their profit and loss. Their charisma is supposed to be in the service of humanity. This is not a means for amassing wealth. A charismatic person need not abjure all worldly comforts. But he looks, down upon day-to-day rational considerations. On the other hand, beggings, gifts, booty, may be regarded as legitimate; and shared with followers.

Charisma is free of established channels, rules and regulations. It does not calculate. It does not count. It does not weigh. It does not rely on division of labour and specialisation of functions. It is not enduring. Charisma is not everyday play. Its appearances are few and far between.

11.2.2.1 Routinisation of charisma: Pure charisma arises under extraordinary circumstances. In easier times, the movement started by a charismatic leader may either get institutionalised or get lost. In the former case, it gets transformed into a sect, a school, an academy, a newspaper, or something of the sort. This happens when it acquires traditional or rational forms due to material or ideal interests of members of his family or the retinue of his disciples in its continuity or succession. They may find out somebody with similar qualities. They may use some oracle or some other way for legitimising the charisma. The followers may recognise one of his men as a rightful successor of the charismatic leader. He himself may instal a successor before passing away. Charisma may even become hereditary. His possessions and privileges are passed on to the successor. Thus the charisma becomes attached to the office and the authority becomes routine. Henceforth whosoever occupies this office (*Khalifs, Sultan, Shah, Guru*) acquires its sacred qualities. These facts are widely made known. If there are rival

claims by several followers of the original leader, these are accompanied by a succession crisis, with intrigues or quarrels. In any case, such charisma does not look down upon day-to-day economic advantages.

Max Weber looked upon himself as a clever, responsible, energetic statesman, a charismatic leader indeed, whom the masses should follow.

11.2.3 Rational-legal authority: Such authority is based upon recognition of properly established rules and regulations as well and proper. Law and constitution are regarded as reasonable, technically suitable, and in more or less general interest. The orders of those possessing such authority, like a magistrate or a manager, are obeyed according to rules. Laws may be enforced through the willing cooperation of those in authority, in expectation of certain rewards, or under fear of punishment. Rules and regulations do not contradict each other. They are uniformly applicable to everybody under the same circumstances. Those in authority are office holders. Nobody is above law. Bureaucracy is an example of rational-legal authority.

Diderot's *Encyclopaedia* (1751) defines rationality, or the sense of reason, as a torch. It enlightens us. Authority is a staff. It helps us to grope our way out. We lean upon it, if we are weak or tired. While nature provides flame for the torch, we make the staff ourselves. Rationality implies: think before you leap. Do not get angry. Understand and explain how the wind is blowing. Rational-legal authority falls back upon formality, and accountability. A rational person chooses proper means for the achievement of certain goals, after due consideration of the pros and cons.

Type	Features
Traditional	Has always been there. Heritage, Inheritance
Charismatic	Magical powers, Revelation, Heroism
Rational	Legally constituted, Official

Fig. 1 : Types of Authority

Bureaucracy is the purest form of rational-legal authority. This is technically superior to all other forms of organisation. It functions like a machine, according to set rules and procedures, with precision and efficiency to a degree uncommon to all other forms of organisation.

In a rational-legal organisation, control is exercised by dint of the same type of power, authority and influence. Its rationality implies that the course of events has been outlined and adequately planned. Its legality means that it leans upon laws enacted by a properly constituted body after due deliberation.

The established rules are recognised as well and proper, technically suitable, and in public interest. The rules and regulations do not contradict each other. These are equitably applicable to everybody under similar conditions, irrespective of caste or creed. These are implemented by accredited agents. Those in authority are office-bearers. The orders of those possessing such authority, like a magistrate or a manager, are more or less spontaneously complied with. Laws may be enforced through the willing cooperation of those subject to authority, in expectation of certain rewards, like bread, butter and plums, or under fear of punishment like the fear of use of a whip or a gun.

Check your knowledge :

Q. 1 Kauda Rakhash catches pilgrims in a jungle, on the way to a shrine. He takes away whatever they have. He kills them, bakes them, and eats them up. What type of authority, if any, he is exercising ?

Q. 2 A medieval king gives five villages to a feudal lord, in return for services in a battlefield in the past. The lord gives some plots of land to his tenants for cultivation, in return for a share in the harvest. What type of authority is it ?

Q. 3 A leader gives a call to his followers, saying : "It is written like that, but I say unto you..." What type of authority is he exercising ? Why do they follow him ?

Q. 4 Salman Khan kills a chinkara deer in a protected sanctuary. A magistrate sentences him to rigorous imprisonment for five years. What type of authority is the magistrate exercising ?

11.3 Elements of Authority :

For a system of authority to exist the following elements must be present :

- (i) an individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters.
- (ii) an individual/group that is ruled.
- (iii) the will of the ruler to influence the conduct of the ruled which may be expressed through commands.
- (iv) evidence of the influence of the rulers in the terms of compliance or obedience shown by the ruled.
- (v) direct or indirect evidence which shows that the ruled have internalised and accepted the fact that the ruler's commands must be obeyed.

We see that authority implies a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers believe that they have the legitimate right to exercise their authority. On the other hand, the ruled accept this power and comply with it, reinforcing its legitimacy.

11.4 Conclusion :

From the above discussion we can say that Authority is the legitimised power. There are three systems of legitimation, each with its corresponding norms which justify the power to command. It is these systems of legitimation which are designated as the types of Authority. They are (a) Traditional (b) Charismatic (c) Rational-Legal. These types of authorities corresponds to the traditional action, emotional or effective action and rational action.

11.5 Exercise Questions :

- 1) What do you mean by Authority? How it is different from Power?
- 2) Define Authority and Discuss its types.
- 3) Explain Authority and its elements.

11.6 Suggested Readings :

1. Scheuch, Erwin K. and Ute, *Buerokraten in den Chefetagen*, Rowolt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1995.
2. Singh, Jaspal, "*The Protestant Ethic, and the Spirit of Capitalism Samaja Shodhana*", (Mangalore), Vol. 7, Nos. 1 & 2. March & October, 1999, pp. 1-12.
3. Singh, Jaspal, *Society, Culture and Socio-Cultural Change*, National Book Organisation, New Delhi, 1996.
4. Weber, Max, *Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft*, Tuebingen, 1976.