

KARL MARX (1818-1883)

Karl Marx was a socialist theoretician and organizer, a major figure in the history of economic and philosophical thought, and a great social prophet. But it is as a sociological theorist that he commands our interest. Karl Marx viewed sociology as a science based on the opium of exploitation of one group by the other.

The Overall Doctrine

Society, according to Marx, comprised a moving balance of antithetical forces that generate social change by their tension and struggle. Marx's vision was based on an evolutionary point of departure. For him, struggle rather than peaceful growth was the engine of progress; strife was the father of all things, and social conflict the core of historical process. This thinking was in contrast with most of the doctrines of his eighteenth century predecessors, but in tune with much nineteenth century thought.

To Marx the motivating force in history was the manner in which men relate to one another in their continuous struggle to wrest their livelihood from nature. "The first historical act is . . . the production of material life itself. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history." The quest for a sufficiency in eating and drinking, for habitation and for clothing were man's primary goals at the dawn of the race, and these needs are still central when attempts are made to analyze the complex anatomy of modern society. But man's struggle against nature does not cease when these needs are gratified.

Man is a perpetually dissatisfied animal. When primary needs have been met, this "leads to new needs--and this production of new needs is the first historical act." New needs evolve when means are found to allow the satisfaction of older ones. In the effort to satisfy primary and secondary needs, men engage in antagonistic cooperation as soon as they leave the primitive, communal stage of development. As soon as a division of labor emerges in human society, that division leads to the formation of antagonistic classes, the prime actors in the historical drama.

Marx was a relativist historicist according to whom all social relations between men, as well as all systems of ideas, are specifically rooted in historical periods. "Ideas and categories are no more eternal than the relations which they express. They are historical and transitory products." For example, whereas the classical economists had seen the tripartite division among landowners, capitalists, and wage earners as eternally given in the natural order of things, Marx considered such categories as typical only for specific historical periods, as products of a historically transient state of affairs.

Historical specificity is the hallmark of Marx's approach. When he asserted, for example, that all previous historical periods were marked by class struggles, he immediately added that these struggles differed according to historical stages. In marked

distinction to his radical predecessors who had tended to see history as a monotonous succession of struggles between rich and poor, or between the powerless and the powerful, Marx maintained that, although class struggles had marked all history, the contenders in the battle had changed over time.

Although there might have been some similarity between the journeymen of the late Middle Ages who waged their battle against guild-masters and the modern industrial workers who confronted capitalists, the contenders were, nevertheless, in a functionally different situation. The character of the overall social matrix determined the forms of struggle which were contained within it.

The fact that modern factory workers, as distinct from medieval journey-men, are forever expropriated from command over the means of production and hence forced to sell their labor power to those who control these means makes them a class qualitatively different from artisans or journeymen. The fact that modern workers are formally "free" to sell their labor while being existentially constrained to do so makes their condition historically specific and functionally distinct from that of earlier exploited classes. He explained what determines social structures and social change. He used four main concepts to do that, namely: substructure; superstructures; forces of production; and relations of production.

Human society was seen to be in two main parts: substructure and superstructure. The substructure of society was taken to be its economic system. The superstructure was viewed as the society's political system, law, religion, philosophy, art, literature, science, morals, and everything else apart from the economy.

Forces of production were the technology used to produce goods and services. The term relations of production referred to relations between different groups of people in the economic system of society or relationships people enter in with one another in the process of producing goods and services.

His main argument was that change in the economy leads to changes in the superstructure and what propels economic change is production forces. According to Marx, humanity is a constant struggle of deriving food and other means of living from nature. This struggle is characterized by a constant improvement of technology (the forces of production). He explained that as technology is improved, in due course, it becomes incompatible with the existing relations of production.

The result is a transformation of the struggle of deriving a livelihood from nature to a conflict between groups of people. A revolution occurs that is led by people wishing to take advantage of the improved technology. This revolution brings about a new type of society which has relations of production suited to the advanced technology. However, the constant improvement of technology means that later the new relations of production, in turn, become

incompatible with technology. So, another revolution takes place to bring about yet another type of society.

This process continues until human society reaches the fifth stage where different classes of people no longer exist in the economy. With this understanding Marx believed that society had to pass through five stages namely;

- (i) **Primitive communism**, the original classless society; exploitation is between man and the environment.
- (i) The **ancient (slave) stage** with slaves and slave owners as the main economic classes; exploitation and struggle is between slaves and slave masters.
- (ii) The **feudal stage** characterized by landlords and serfs (persons not allowed to leave the land on which he worked); exploitation and struggle is between the feudal (land) lords and the serfs
- (iii) The **capitalist stage** where the main economic classes are private employers and wage workers; employers (bourgeoisie) exploits the workers (proletariats)
- (iv) The classless **communist stage** where only workers exist, jointly owning all the means of production.

To throw more light on this view of social change, it is worth looking at his discussion of the coming and disappearance of the feudal stage and his expected change from capitalism to communism. Marx showed that technological development in the feudal society led to rise of private owners of capital (the bourgeoisie) as a new class in society. The emerging technological development had reached but found the existing feudal social relations of production a hindrance. The solution was to fight for and set up a society of free workers (workers who could leave one employer and get engaged by another). So, the bourgeoisie became revolutionary. In Marx's view, it was through their struggle that the capitalist system was born. Marx, however, spent a great deal of effort and time to find out how the capitalist system would change and give way to the rise of the final stage of classless communist society. He examined the relations of production in capitalist society and found that the major classes were:

- (i) owners merely of labour-power (the proletariat);
- (ii) owners of capital (the bourgeoisie); and
- (iii) owners of land.

Respective sources of income of these classes were said to be wages, profit and ground-rent, but that this situation would not lead automatically to class conflict and result in the classless communist society.

He introduced two concepts to explain how from capitalism to communism would occur. The concepts are: (i) class-in-itself; and (ii) class-for-itself. A class-in-itself is one whose members are not conscious with common social economic fate that they share. These in short haven't developed a sense of belonging. A class-for-itself is one that has become conscious in sharing this common social economic fate and starts fighting another group of people to improve its lot.

With this clarification, the proletariat, bourgeoisie, and land owners were initially seen as "classes-in-themselves" rather than "classes-for-themselves". Later, the proletariat would become a class-for-itself. It would fight the bourgeoisie. He argued that the proletariat would increasingly develop a sense of **class-consciousness** and unity of its members. Class consciousness simply is the awareness of the existence of an exploiting class. Proletariats would be transformed into a class-for-itself because of the following facilitating factors:

- (i) concentration of masses of people;
- (ii) a network of communication among the people;
- (iii) existence of a perceived common enemy; and
- (iv) Formation of an organization to champion the interest of the proletariat.

This means that workers making up proletariat class would be concentrated in certain places of work where eventually they would be able to communicate about their work conditions. The communication, in turn, would enable them to overcome initial competitiveness among themselves for better wages and conditions of service to form some kind of organization for combined action. In the process, the bourgeois would be seen as their real enemy. Those workers would then wage a successful revolution that would see an end of capitalism and usher in classless communism.

Marx felt bourgeoisie are incapable of uniting like the workers. The reason put forward was that their belief in the importance of a competitive market economy tends to separate the individual capitalists, rather than unite them for a common fight against another class. Marx was quick to add that outside the economic arena, members of the bourgeoisie do unite. They unite in the political and ideological spheres to evolve a justification for existence of the capitalist system and to maintain a political set up that dominates the proletariat.

THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

Another important concept of Marx's overall theory on social classes is that of alienation. This concept implies separation. Marx explained that in the process of extracting food and other means of subsistence from nature, human beings arrange themselves in specific ways. In the ancient stage of slave labour they arranged themselves as slaves and free people, during feudalism the arrangement was that of Serfs and feudal lords, and during capitalism the arrangement is basically that of wagers and private owners of capital. In each of these ways, people find themselves in positions of inequality in terms of power and access to outputs of the production process. Under the circumstances, economic surplus is separated (alienated) from the proletariat to be increasingly accumulated by the bourgeoisie. In capitalism, Marx saw that alienation in the sphere of work is fourfold. Each worker is separated from:

- (i) the objects produced by his or her labour;

- (ii) the production process itself;
- (iii) himself or herself; and
- (iv) the community of fellow human beings.

What the worker produces is separated from himself or herself to belong to owners of the capital. The production process itself too, does not belong to the worker; it belongs to the capitalist. The individual worker is alienated from himself or herself in the sense that as worker in the sphere of production, the whole body belongs to the capitalist. In the capitalist society, Marx emphasized, a worker is also alienated from fellow man. In particular, the worker and the capitalist are not fellows; they are separated by their different class interest. Besides, for most of the time, workers see fellow workers as competitors for better wages and conditions of service. It takes a while for them to unit and wage a common struggle against the bourgeoisie. Thus, workers are often times alienated from fellow human beings in the society.

In capitalist society, according to Marx, alienation also existing in spheres other than that of work. He saw alienation existing in religion, the state, and other institutions of capitalist society. Throughout, alienation is basically a condition in which human beings are dominated by forces which they themselves create and which confront them as alien powers.

ASSESSMENT

Marx's theory of social classes emphasized that the economy is the foundation upon which the social structure of a society is built and is the engine of social change. While some people disagree with this view, the importance of economic factors in shaping life in society has met with general acceptance. So, highlighting this importance is yet another significant contribution made by Karl Marx to sociology.

Many criticism however, have been made about Marx's work. Most of these concern specific predictions that he made. Firstly, revolutions have not taken place throughout the World to overthrow the capitalist system. Instead what has happened is a consolidation of capitalism, more so since 1989 when the communist USSR began to crumble to give way to establishment of capitalism there.

Secondly, the disappearance of or withering away of the state as Marx's prediction, has not taken place. Thirdly, Marx's prediction that there would be a progressive impoverishment of the working class in capitalist countries has not occurred in the industrialized ones. Most industrialized capitalist countries have workers with high levels of living and have put in place safety nets for workers to be cushioned when they are temporarily out of work. Welfare schemes act as safety nets for workers in those countries.

EMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917)

Emile Durkheim was a French Sociologist and is considered to be one of the greatest classical writers of sociology. Like many other

sociological scholars, Durkheim was also for the idea that a scientific study of society was possible and he therefore viewed sociology as a science that could be used to elucidate tied philosophical questions by examining them in an empirical manner. His contributions to the field of sociology were in the form of social facts, anomie, social solidarity and the study of suicide together with his theory on religion.

(i) Social Facts

Since Durkheim supported the idea that a scientific study of society was possible, he referred to social phenomena as social facts and he felt that social facts should be the subject matter of sociology. He believed that social facts should be studied as things (non-living) in the same way natural phenomena are studied by natural scientists. He was against biologicistic or psychologistic interpretations of society. Durkheim stated that social facts are distinct and external to the psychology of an individual.

Durkheim therefore defined social facts as things external to an individual. They are regarded as any way of behaving which is capable of exercising an outside constraint on the individual. They are created from collective forces and do not emanate from individuals. A social fact is any way of behavior which is universal throughout a given society e.g when a person fulfils obligations as a brother, husband or citizen, that person fulfils obligations that are defined externally to him.

These obligations remain outside because they were not created by an individual but by other people in society. Social facts are learned through the process of socialization. He also stated that social facts exist in the form of constitutions, legal codes and other documents. They are there to guide and regulate human conduct.

(ii) Solidarity in societies

In his theories, Durkheim's central concern was the question of social cohesion. A society is composed of various kinds of segments, such as different kin groups, classes, and political and religious units. Still, these separate units stay together and are structured to become one coherent society. What is it that binds these different segments? In short, Durkheim wished to understand what elements held a society. Durkheim presented his answer by developing the concept of solidarity, which is a force to integrate separate segments in a society. This force is the result of a shared system of beliefs and values, which unites members of the society and controls individuals' behavior.

Durkheim compared many societies in the world and came up with two types; simple or primitive society and modern society. He concluded that there are two different types of force that integrate separate segments of a society. According to him, simple societies are characterized by what he called "mechanical solidarity" while modern societies were characterized by "organic solidarity."

Mechanical solidarity applies to societies in which all members have common and shared social experiences, and special subdivisions within a society are either absent or weak. It is solidarity based on resemblance. Because of this homogeneity, each individual is directly and equally attached to the society. An example of a mechanical solidarity society is a hunting and gathering society, which is small and simple enough to keep the similarity among individuals of the group.

Organic solidarity is a kind of solidarity based on differences and is found in advanced societies. Societies, here are formed by a system of different organs, each of which has a specific role. Members of such societies belong to some of these organs and fulfill their specific tasks.

Because individuals' tasks do not cover all aspects of their survival, they need to depend on each other to live in the society. They are held together to each other by one central organ which controls the rest of the organism. For example, institutions in an industrialized society are interrelated under the legal system from the central government. Each institution, such as corporations, marriages, and families, nonprofit organizations, and political offices, is separate and different. However, all institutions are subordinate to the rule of law which keeps them functioning in harmony. Organic solidarity occurs because of division of labour which brings about interdependence.

Durkheim extended this analysis to the evolution of societies. In mechanical (relatively primitive) societies, cohesion is achieved because of the minimization of individual differences.

In organic (modern) societies differences resulting from a division of labor lead to integrated activities, thus cohesion of societies. The distinction between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity are so clear that one society cannot have both aspects at the same time. This means that only after mechanical solidarity declines, organic solidarity develops as a new system. Historically, this change occurs systematically. First, innovations in the economy happen. Second, these innovations affect human population density. Finally, the increased population density leads to the division of labor.

(iii) Anomie

To Durkheim, human beings are creatures of unlimited desires both moral and spiritual. Unlike other animals the more one has, the more he wants. In order to hold desires, society imposes external control otherwise it would turn into chaos. When social relations breakdown, social control it has on individuals breaks down and is no longer effective and individuals are left to their own desires in pursuit of their own interests. This is called anomie, which is a condition of relative normlessness which can be on a whole society or some parts of it. Anomie is present during times of sudden social changes for example during rapid economic progress or

downturn because of loss of moral certainty and customary expectations. This is so because social networks break down.

(iv) Suicide

From his account of anomie, it is clear that Durkheim was concerned with order and regulation in society. It is in this right that his discussion on suicide should be understood. Durkheim defined suicide as every case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act performed by the victim himself which strives to produce these results.

In short, it is the act of taking one's own life. Durkheim was concerned with why certain societies have high suicide rates than others. The variations were explained by levels of social integration and regulation. Suicide can also be direct or indirect. Direct suicide is one where for example one shoots him/herself while indirect suicide can involve for instance refusing treatment.

To Durkheim, suicide results from social integration and social regulation. Social integration refers to the degree of social attachments people have to social groups or societies as a whole. Societies with high or low levels of social integration will more likely experience suicide. Durkheim therefore came up with four types of suicide;

1. Egoistic suicide; this is a type of suicide that results from too little social support or integration. It occurs when people become detached from society and the bonds which previously tied them to other members of society become loose. It is common among the unmarried and widowed. These feel that their death will not affect society in any way as they feel helpless and hopeless.

2. Altruistic Suicide; this result from too much integration. It is the opposite of egoistic suicide. This is where an individual puts interests of the group or community first and feels that his/her death will benefit society. It is practiced by for instance Islamic suicide bombers.

3. Anomic Suicide; this results when the norms regulating individual conduct are relaxed and as a result fail to control and guide human desires. This type of suicide is common during sudden socio-economic changes like during an economic boom or down turn or during a war or natural disasters like earthquakes. During such periods people tend to commit suicide because the rules regulating human conduct cease to apply and control people's actions.

4. Fatalistic Suicide; this is a rear type of suicide which occurs in situations of excessive regulations to the extent that individuals feel oppressed. This may involve for example someone killing him/herself after committing a grave offence to avoid severe punishment. It is commonly practiced by slaves, prisoners, childless married women and to a less extent by young husbands.

ASSESSMENT

Durkheim was criticized on the basis of his conclusion on suicide. Durkheim is accused of using incomplete and partial statistics based on small numbers on his study.

MAX WEBER (1864-1920)

Weber was a Germany Sociologist and was concerned with establishing Sociology as a science that is able to identify causal relationships especially among ideal types or hypothetical simplifications of complex social phenomena. He looked at sociology as an extensive science of social action. Weber's sociological contributions were mainly in the area of social science research. He was opposed to the idea of employing the same methods used in the natural sciences in studying the social sciences. Weber asserted that these are different worlds and cannot be understood using the same empirical methods as human society has culture, unlike the societies of other animals (e.g., ants, dolphins, etc. operate from nature or ecology as opposed to that of civilization).

This view was further developed by Max Weber, who introduced the concept of verstehen. Verstehen is a research approach in which outside observers of a culture relate to an indigenous people on the observer's own terms. The verstehen approach has laid the foundation for qualitative sociological research. Verstehen is an interpretative approach toward social science research. It is a systematic process in which an outside observer attempts to relate to a particular cultural group or indigenous people on their own terms and from their own points of view. It is about understanding meanings people attach to their actions.

Weber also went forward and stated that for someone (a researcher) to understand meanings actors attach to their actions; they need to put themselves in other people's shoes or situations. He termed this empathy which literally means putting oneself in the shoes of another person and tries to understand the situation from another person's point of view.

In order to provide a better understanding of how sociological scientific research can be done, he came up with the concept of ideal types. Weber argued that social phenomena can be understood scientifically only to the extent that they are captured by models of the behavior of purposeful individuals. He called these models ideal types. Ideal types never exist in real life but provide objective benchmarks against which real life constructs can be measured. This came about so that sociologists should do historical comparative studies.

In his concern for social science research, Weber also realized the effect of personal values in social research. He therefore came up with the concept of value free sociology. Weber asserted that sociology should be objective in its scientific inquiries. Weber state that a researcher is not supposed to attach his or her own feelings, emotions and experiences when conducting research but should try to be objective as much as possible though it is quite difficult.