

**CORE COURSE**  
**SEMESTER 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
**DSC-SOC-1B**  
**SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT**

**UNIT-I**

**AUGUSTE COMTE**

**Auguste Comte (1798–1857)**

Born in the French city of Montpellier on January 19, 1798, Auguste Comte grew up in the period of great political turmoil that followed the French Revolution of 1789–1799. In August 1817, Comte met Henri Saint-Simon and became his secretary and eventually his close collaborator. Under Saint-Simon's influence, Comte converted from an ardent advocate of liberty and equality to a supporter of an elitist conception of society. Saint-Simon and Comte rejected the lack of empiricism in the social philosophy of the day. Instead they turned for inspiration to the methods and intellectual framework of the natural sciences, which they perceived as having led to the spectacular successes of industrial progress. They set out to develop a "science of man" that would reveal the underlying principles of society much as the sciences of physics and chemistry explained nature and guided industrial progress. During their association the two men collaborated on a number of essays, most of which contained the seeds of Comte's major ideas. Their alliance came to a bitter end in 1824 when Comte broke with Saint-Simon for both financial and intellectual reasons. Comte saw this new science, which he named sociology, as the greatest of all sciences. Sociology would include all other sciences and bring them all together into a cohesive whole. Financial problems, lack of academic recognition, and marital difficulties combined to force Comte into a shell. Eventually, for reasons of "cerebral hygiene," he no longer read any scientific work related to the fields about which he was writing. Living in isolation at the periphery of the academic world, Comte concentrated his efforts between 1830 and 1842 on writing his major work, *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, the work in which he actually coined the term *sociology*. Comte devoted a great deal of his writing to describing the contributions he expected sociology would make in the future. He was much less concerned with defining sociology's subject matter than with showing how it would improve society.

**Law of three stages**

Every society or human mind passes through three stages during the course of evolution.

1. **Theological Stage:** This stage was dominated by priests and the military with an overriding belief that all things were caused by supernatural beings. The theological stage itself passes through three phases namely fetishism, polytheism and monotheism
2. **Metaphysical stage:** This stage was dominated by churchmen and lawyers, a stage in which the supernatural powers were taken over by abstract forces. This stage started about 1300 A.D. and was short lived.
3. **Positive Stage:** The dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of positive stage, dominated by industrial administrators and scientists, and in this stage observation predominates over imagination and all theoretical concepts are based on scientific knowledge.

Corresponding to three stages of mental progress, there are three states or epochs of society. The theological and metaphysical stages are dominated by military values, and the positive stage heralds the advent of industrial society. With respect to this Comte has identified two major types of societies: the theological military society, characterised by the predominance of theological thinking and military activities, and the scientific industrial society in which priests and theologians are replaced by scientists who represent the new moral and intellectual power. Thus, Comte's theory of progress is often referred to as the unilinear theory of evolution.

### **Positivism**

Comte's approach is called positivism, a way of understanding based on science. As a positivist, Comte believed that society operates according to its own laws, much as the physical world operates according to gravity and other laws of nature. Comte believed that sociology must follow the positive science method. He advocated a three step methodology for study of sociology. These steps are observation, experimentation and comparison. He explained the different stages of evolution by this method. However, Comte confessed that experimentation was only partly applicable in social sciences. In addition, he suggested the use of historical methods especially in the study of social dynamics.

### **Social static and social dynamics**

Comte has divided sociology into social statics and social dynamics. Social dynamics is concerned with changing aspects of society i.e. progress, development or change whereas social statics is the study of the conditions of society's existence at any given moment which is analysed by means of a theory of social order. A basic fact of social order established by

the laws of nature is that of ‘consensus universalis’, a universal agreement among all societies of dialectically creative role of order and progress. According to Comte, ‘consensus universalis’ is the foundation of solidarity in society.

## **UNIT-II**

### **EMILE DURKHEIM**

#### **Emile Durkheim**

Emile Durkheim’s great insight was recognizing that society exists beyond us. Society is more than the individuals who compose it. Society was here long before we were born, it shapes us while we live, and it will remain long after we are gone. Patterns of human behaviour—cultural norms, values, and beliefs—exist as established structures, or *social facts*, that have an objective reality beyond the lives of individuals. Because society is bigger than any one of us, it has the power to guide our thoughts and actions. This is why studying individuals alone (as psychologists or biologists do) can never capture the heart of the social experience. A classroom of college students taking a math exam, a family gathered around a table sharing a meal, people quietly waiting their turn in a doctor’s office—all are examples of the countless situations that have a familiar organization apart from any particular individual who has ever been part of them. Once created by people, Durkheim claimed, society takes on a life of its own and demands a measure of obedience from its creators. We experience the power of society when we see lives falling into common patterns or when we feel the tug of morality during a moment of temptation. Having established that society has structure, Durkheim turned to the concept of *function*. The significance of any social fact, he explained, is more than what individuals see in their immediate lives; social facts help along the operation of society as a whole. Consider crime. As victims of crime, individuals experience pain and loss. But taking a broader view, Durkheim saw that crime is vital to the ongoing life of society itself. He explains, only by defining acts as wrong do people construct and defend morality, which gives direction and meaning to our collective life. For this reason, Durkheim rejected the common view of crime as abnormal. On the contrary, he concluded, crime is “normal” for the most basic of reasons: A society could not exist without it.

#### **Social Fact**

According to Durkheim, social facts are ways of acting, thinking and feeling which are capable of searching an external constraint on the individual, which are generally diffused

throughout a given society and which can exist on their own life, independent of individual manifestation. The three main characteristics of social facts are Exteriority, Generality and Constraint. Durkheim treated social facts as things. The true nature of social facts lies in the collective or associational characteristics inherent in society. Legal codes, religious beliefs, language etc are all social facts. Durkheim has made an important distinction in terms of normal and pathological social facts. A social fact is normal when it is generally encountered in a society of a certain type at a certain phase in its evolution, and deviation from this standard is a pathological fact. For example, crime to a certain extent is a normal fact but an extraordinary increase in the rate of crime is pathological.

### **The Division of Labour**

Like Marx and Weber, Durkheim lived through the rapid social change that swept across Europe during the nineteenth century as the Industrial Revolution unfolded. But Durkheim offered his own understanding of this change. In preindustrial societies, he explained, tradition operates as the social cement that binds people together. In fact, what he termed the *collective conscience* is so strong that the community moves quickly to punish anyone who dares to challenge conventional ways of life. Durkheim used the term mechanical solidarity to refer to *social bonds, based on common sentiments and shared moral values that are strong among members of preindustrial societies*. In practice, mechanical solidarity is based on *similarity*. Durkheim called these bonds “mechanical” because people are linked together in lockstep, with a more or less automatic sense of belonging together and acting alike. With industrialization, Durkheim continued, mechanical solidarity becomes weaker and weaker, and people are much less bound by tradition. But this does not mean that society dissolves. Modern life creates a new type of solidarity. Durkheim called this new social integration organic solidarity, defined as *social bonds, based on specialization and interdependence that are strong among members of industrial societies*. The solidarity that was once rooted in likeness is now based on *differences* among people who find that their specialized work—as plumbers, college students, midwives, or sociology instructors—makes them rely on other people for most of their daily needs. For Durkheim, then, the key to change in a society is an expanding division of labor, or *specialized economic activity*. Weber said that modern societies specialize in order to become more efficient, and Durkheim filled out the picture by showing that members of modern societies count on tens of thousands of others—most of them strangers—for the goods and services needed every day. As members of modern societies, we depend more and more on people we trust less and less. Why do we look to

people we hardly know and whose beliefs may well differ from our own? Durkheim's answer was "because we can't live without them." So, modern society rests far less on *moral consensus* and far more on *functional interdependence*. Herein lies what we might call "Durkheim's dilemma": The technological power and greater personal freedom of modern society come at the cost of declining morality and the rising risk of anomie. Like Marx and Weber, Durkheim is worried about the direction society was taking. But of the three, Durkheim was the most optimistic. He saw that large, anonymous societies gave people more freedom and privacy than small towns. Anomie remains a danger, but Durkheim hoped we would be able to create laws and other norms to regulate our behaviour.

### **Suicide**

Durkheim believed suicide rates were influenced by group cohesion and societal stability. He believed that low levels of cohesion—which involve more individual choice, more self-reliance, and fewer adherences to group standards—would mean high rates of suicide. To test his idea, Durkheim decided to study the suicide rates of Catholic versus Protestant countries. He assumed the suicide rate in Catholic countries would be lower than in Protestant countries because Protestantism emphasized the individual's relationship to God over community ties. The comparison of suicide records in Catholic and Protestant countries in Europe supported his theory by showing the probability of suicide was indeed higher in Protestant countries. Recognizing the possibility that lower suicide rates among Catholics could be based on factors other than group cohesion, Durkheim proceeded to test other groups. Reasoning that married people would have more group ties than single people, or people with children more than people without children, or non-college educated people more than college-educated people (because college tends to break group ties and encourage individualism), or Jews more than non-Jews, Durkheim tested each of these groups, and in each case, his theory held. Then, characteristic of the scientist that he was, Durkheim extended his theory by identifying three types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, and anomic—that take place under different types of conditions. Egoistic suicide comes from low group cohesion, an under involvement with others. Durkheim argued that loneliness and a commitment to personal beliefs rather than to group values can lead to egoistic suicide. Therefore, he found that single and divorced people had higher suicide rates than did married people and that Protestants, who tend to stress individualism, had higher rates of suicide than did Catholics. Altruistic suicide derives from a very high level of group cohesion, an over involvement with others. The individual is so tied to a certain set of goals that he or she is willing to die for the sake of the community. This

type of suicide, as Durkheim noted in his time, still exists in the military as well as in societies based on ancient codes of honor and obedience. Perhaps the best-known historical examples of altruistic suicide come from Japan in the ceremonial rite of *seppuku*, in which a disgraced person rips open his own belly, and in the kamikaze attacks by Japanese pilots toward the end of World War II. The Japanese pilots, instead of being morose before the bombing missions (that would cause their certain deaths), were often reported to be cheerful and serene. One 23-year-old kamikaze, in a letter to his parents, voiced the feelings of thousands of his fellows when he wrote, “I shall be a shield for His Majesty and die cleanly along with my squadron leader and other friends.” Today, we often see examples of altruistic suicide in the terrorists who flew the planes into the World Trade towers and in the Middle Eastern suicide bombers. These individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives for their cause as they blow up a building, plane, or restaurant. In addition to destroying the property, the terrorists often want to kill as many people as possible. Anomic suicide results from a sense of feeling disconnected from society’s values. A person might know what goals to strive for but not be able to attain them, or a person might not know what goals to pursue. Durkheim found that times of rapid social change or economic crisis are associated with high rates of anomic suicide. Durkheim’s study was important not only because it proved that the most personal of all acts, suicide, is in fact a product of social forces but also because it was one of the first examples of a scientifically conducted sociological study. Durkheim systematically posed theories, tested them, and drew conclusions that led to further theories. He also published his results for everyone to see and criticize.

### **UNIT-III**

### **KARL MARX**

#### **Karl Marx**

The first of our classic visions of society comes from Karl Marx (1818–1883), an early giant in the field of sociology whose influence continues today. Keenly aware of how the Industrial Revolution had changed Europe, Marx spent most of his adult life in London; the capital of what was then the vast British Empire. He was awed by the size and productive power of the new factories going up all over Britain. Along with other industrial nations, Britain was producing more goods than ever before, drawing raw materials from around the world and churning out finished products at a dizzying rate. What astounded Marx even more was that the riches produced by this new technology ended up in the hands of only a few people. As

he walked around the city of London, he could see for himself that a handful of aristocrats and industrialists enjoyed lives of luxury and privilege, living in fabulous mansions staffed by many servants. At the same time, most people lived in slums and laboured long hours for low wages. Some even slept in the streets, where they were likely to die young from diseases brought on by cold and poor nutrition. Marx saw his society in terms of a basic contradiction: In a country so rich, how could so many people be so poor? Just as important, he asked, how can this situation be changed? Many people think Marx set out to tear societies apart. But he was motivated by compassion and wanted to help a badly divided society create a new and more just social order. At the heart of Marx's thinking is the idea of social conflict, *the struggle between segments of society over valued resources*. Social conflict can, of course, take many forms: Individuals quarrel, colleges have long-standing sports rivalries, and nations sometimes go to war. For Marx, however, the most important type of social conflict was *class conflict* arising from the way a society produces material goods.

### **Historical Materialism**

For Marx, conflict is the engine that drives social change. Sometimes societies change at a slow, *evolutionary* rate. But they may erupt in rapid, *revolutionary* change. To Marx, early hunters and gatherers formed primitive communist societies. *Communism* is a system in which people commonly own and equally share food and other things they produce. People in hunting and gathering societies do not have much, but they share what they have. In addition, because everyone does the same kind of work, there are no class differences and thus little chance of social conflict. With technological advance comes social inequality. Among horticultural, pastoral, and early agrarian societies—which Marx lumped together as the “ancient world”—warfare was frequent, and the victors turned their captives into slaves. Agriculture brings still more wealth to a society's elite but does little for most other people, who labour as serfs and are barely better off than slaves. As Marx saw it, the state supported the feudal system (in which the elite or nobility had all the power), assisted by the church, which claimed that this arrangement reflected the will of God. This is why Marx thought that feudalism was simply “exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions”. Gradually, new productive forces started to break down the feudal order. As trade steadily increased, cities grew, and merchants and skilled crafts workers formed the new capitalist class or *bourgeoisie* (a French word meaning “people of the town”). After 1800, the bourgeoisie also controlled factories, becoming richer and richer so that they soon rivalled the ancient landowning nobility. For their part, the nobles looked down their noses at this upstart

“commercial” class, but in time, these capitalists took control of European societies. To Marx’s way of thinking, then, new technology was only part of the Industrial Revolution; it also served as a class revolution in which capitalists overthrew the old agrarian elite. Industrialization also led to the formation of the proletariat. English landowners converted fields once ploughed by serfs into grazing land for sheep to produce wool for the textile mills. Forced from the land, millions of people migrated to cities and had little choice but to work in factories. Marx envisioned these workers one day joining together to form a revolutionary class that would overthrow the capitalist system

### **Class struggle and class conflict**

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” With these words, Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, began their best-known statement, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Industrial capitalism, like earlier types of society, contains two major social classes: the ruling class, whose members (capitalists or bourgeoisie) own productive property, and the oppressed (proletarians), who sell their labour, reflecting the two basic positions in the productive system. Like masters and slaves in the ancient world and like nobles and serfs in feudal systems, capitalists and proletarians are engaged in class conflict today. Currently, as in the past, one class controls the other as productive property. Marx used the term class conflict (and sometimes *class struggle*) to refer to *conflict between entire classes over the distribution of a society’s wealth and power*. Class conflict is nothing new. What distinguishes the conflict in capitalist society, Marx pointed out, is how out in the open it is. Agrarian nobles and serfs, for all their differences, were bound together by traditions and mutual obligations. Industrial capitalism dissolved those ties so that loyalty and honour were replaced by “naked self-interest.” Because the proletarians had no personal ties to the capitalists, Marx saw no reason for them to put up with their oppression. Marx knew that revolution would not come easily. First, workers must *become aware* of their oppression and see capitalism as its true cause. Second, they must *organize and act* to address their problems. This means that false consciousness must be replaced with class consciousness, *workers’ recognition of themselves as a class unified in opposition to capitalists and ultimately to capitalism itself*. Because the inhumanity of early capitalism was plain for him to see, Marx concluded that industrial workers would soon rise up to destroy this economic system. How would the capitalists react? Their wealth made them strong. But Marx saw a weakness in the capitalist armor. Motivated by a desire for personal gain capitalists feared competition with other capitalists. Marx predicted, therefore, that capitalists

would be slow to band together despite their common interests. In addition, he reasoned, capitalists kept employees wages low in order to maximize profits, which made the workers misery ever greater. In the long run, Marx believed, capitalists would bring about their own undoing.

### **Dialectical Materialism**

Living in the nineteenth century, Marx observed the early decades of industrial capitalism in Europe. This economic system, Marx explained, turned a small part of the population into **capitalists**, *people who own and operate factories and other businesses in pursuit of profits*. A capitalist tries to make a profit by selling a product for more than it costs to produce. Capitalism turns most of the population into industrial workers, whom Marx called **proletarians**, *people who sell their labour for wages*. To Marx, a system of capitalist production always ends up creating conflict between capitalists and workers. To keep profits high, capitalists keep wages low. But workers want higher wages. Since profits and wages come from the same pool of funds, the result is conflict. As Marx saw it, this conflict could end only with the end of capitalism itself. All societies are composed of **social institutions**, *the major spheres of social life, or societal subsystems, organized to meet human needs*. Examples of social institutions include the economy, the political system, the family, religion, and education. In his analysis of society, Marx argued that one institution—the economy—dominates all the others and defines the character of the entire society. Drawing on the philosophical approach called *materialism*, which says that how humans produce material goods shapes their experiences, Marx believed that the other social institutions all operate in a way that supports a society's economy. Lenski focused on how technology moulds a society but, for Marx, it is the economy that forms a society's "real foundation". Marx viewed the economic system as society's *infrastructure* (*infra* is Latin, meaning "below"). Other social institutions, including the family, the political system, and religion, are built on this foundation; they form society's *superstructure* and support the economy. Marx was well aware that most people living in an industrial capitalist system do not recognize how capitalism shapes the operation of their entire society. Most people, in fact, regard the right to own private property or pass it on to their children as "natural." In the same way, many of us tend to see rich people as having "earned" their money through long years of schooling and hard work; we see the poor, on the other hand, as lacking skills and the personal drive to make more of them. Marx rejected this type of thinking, calling it **false consciousness**, *explaining social problems as the shortcomings of individuals rather than as the flaws of*

*society*. Marx was saying, in effect, that it is not “people” who make society so unequal but rather the system of capitalist production. False consciousness, he believed, hurts people by hiding the real cause of their problems.

## UNIT-IV MAX WEBER

### Max Weber

With a wide-ranging knowledge of law, economics, religion, and history, Max Weber (1864–1920) produced what many experts regard as the greatest individual contribution ever made to sociology. This scholar, born to a prosperous family in Germany, had much to say about how modern society differs from earlier types of social organization. Weber understood the power of technology, and he shared many of Marx’s ideas about social conflict. But he disagreed with Marx’s philosophy of materialism. Weber’s philosophical approach, called *idealism*, emphasized how human ideas—especially beliefs and values—shape society. He argued that the most important difference among societies is not how people produce things but how people think about the world. In Weber’s view, modern society was the product of a new way of thinking. Weber compared societies in different times and places. To make the comparisons, he relied on the ideal type, *an abstract statement of the essential characteristics of any social phenomenon*. Following Weber’s approach, for example, we might speak of “preindustrial” and “industrial” societies as ideal types. The use of the word “ideal” does not mean that one or the other is “good” or “best.” Nor does an ideal type refer to any actual society. Rather, think of an ideal type as a way of defining a type of society in its pure form. We have already used ideal types in comparing “hunting and gathering societies” with “industrial societies” and “capitalism” with “socialism.”

### Ideal Type

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societies” with “industrial societies” and “capitalism” with “socialism.” Ideal type was used as a methodological tool or concepts which are formulated for interpretation and explanation of social reality. It is also used for analysis of concrete historical events or situation.

### **Social Action**

Weber conceived of sociology as a comprehensive science of social action which constitutes the basic unit of social life. In consonance with his general perception of the nature of social reality, he defined social action as the “meaningful act oriented towards other individuals”. There are four types of social actions.

1. Zweckrational action in relation to goals
2. Wertrational action in relation to value
3. Traditional action
4. Affective action

### **Protestant ethics and spirit of capitalism**

Weber spent many years considering how and why industrial capitalism developed in the first place. Why did it emerge in parts of Western Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Weber claimed that the key to the birth of industrial capitalism lay in the Protestant Reformation. Specifically, he saw industrial capitalism as the major outcome of Calvinism, a Christian religious movement founded by John Calvin (1509–1564). Calvinists approached life in a formal and rational way that Weber characterized as *inner-worldly asceticism*. This mind-set leads people to deny themselves worldly pleasures in favour of a highly disciplined focus on economic pursuits. In practice, Calvinism encouraged people to put their time and energy into their work; in modern terms, we might say that such people become good businesspeople or entrepreneurs. Another of Calvin’s most important ideas was *predestination*, the belief that an all-knowing and all-powerful God had predestined some people for salvation and others for damnation. Believing that everyone’s fate was set before birth, early Calvinists thought that people could only guess at what their destiny was and that, in any case, they could do nothing to change it. So Calvinists swung between hopeful visions of spiritual salvation and anxious fears of eternal damnation. Frustrated at not knowing their fate, Calvinists gradually came to a resolution of sorts. Wouldn’t those chosen for glory in the next world, they reasoned, see signs of divine favour in *this* world? In this

way, Calvinists came to see worldly prosperity as a sign of God's grace. Eager to gain this reassurance, Calvinists threw themselves into a quest for business success, applying rationality, discipline, and hard work to their tasks. They were certainly pursuing wealth, but they were not doing this for the sake of money, at least not to spend on themselves because any self-indulgence would be sinful. Neither were Calvinists likely to use their wealth for charity. To share their wealth with the poor seemed to go against God's will because they viewed poverty as a sign of God's rejection. Calvinists' duty was pressing forward in what they saw as their personal *calling* from God, reinvesting the money they made for still greater success. It is easy to see how such activity—saving money, using wealth to create more wealth, and adopting new technology—became the foundation of capitalism. Other world religions did not encourage the rational pursuit of wealth the way Calvinism did. Catholicism, the traditional religion in most of Europe, taught a passive, “otherworldly” view: Good deeds performed humbly on Earth would bring rewards in heaven. For Catholics, making money had none of the spiritual significance it had for Calvinists. Weber concluded that this was the reason that industrial capitalism developed primarily in areas of Europe where Calvinism was strong. Weber's study of Calvinism provides striking evidence of the power of ideas to shape society. Not one to accept simple explanations, Weber knew that industrial capitalism had many causes. But by stressing the importance of ideas, Weber tried to counter Marx's strictly economic explanation of modern society. As the decades passed, later generations of Calvinists lost much of their early religious enthusiasm. But their drive for success and personal discipline remained, and what started out as a *religious* ethic was gradually transformed into a *work* ethic. In this sense, Weber considered industrial capitalism to be a “disenchanted” religion, with wealth no longer valued as a sign of salvation but for its own sake. This transformation is seen in the fact that the practice of “accounting,” which to early Calvinists meant keeping a daily record of their moral deeds, before long came to mean simply keeping track of money.