

Unit 9

Class and Legitimacy

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Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you should be able to

- locate the various types of legitimacy
- outline the bases of legitimacy
- describe the fluid bases of legitimacy

9.1 Introduction

In this unit, we shall be discussing to important concept of sociology that is class and legitimacy. In the first part of this unit, we shall be concentrating on the concept of class as elaborated by Karl Marx. In the second part, we shall be dealing with the notion of legitimacy as propagated by Max Weber. Let us begin with the concept of class.

Class in conventional sense is a collectivity or a group of people who have some characteristics in common. Several scholars have identified several characteristics in identifying classes. They have also located the position of class in the society in different ways. For Marx, economic position is the prime in locating class position of a group of people in the society. To put it very simply, class to him is a category of people, who have a common economic interest against those of other class in the society. These to him, are the objective economic condition for the formulation of classes in the society. To him, however, class is not only an economic category, but also a social force to bring about changes in the society. Here, he emphasises on the issue of subjective consciousness as the key factor for the transformation of the economic categories of the class as the change agents to bring about revolution in the society. Thus, to him a category of people with a common economic interest viz – a – viz other form class-in-itself. And when this class-in-itself is mediated by subjective class consciousness, it emerges to be class-for-itself. Indeed, it is the revolutionary class who is ready for action and change in the society.

It is important that class is not static social category: rather is undergoes a process of transformation of the society. In each of the economic stage of

every society, class is distinctly placed with distinctive social and historical roles. We have to understand, this in detail Marxian concept of class relation and change.

Class Relation and Change

In all the stages of economic transformation of society, there have been specific forms of class struggles. Social classes according to Karl Marx are the main agents of social change. The change is however based on class conflict. Thus to him "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

Classes, to Marx, are formed based on objective material conditions. These are groups of people with a common economic position vis-a-vis those of other class. In essence this economic interest is conflicting and contradictory to each other's class position. These class relations get transformed for hostile action against each other with the intermediation of class consciousness. The objective material conditions form the basis for the formation of 'class-in-itself' which get transformed in 'class-for-itself' in the process of transversing of subjective class consciousness.

To Karl Marx, though the class relation was very complicated in the earlier epochs of history, in the modern stage of capitalism this has been simplified. In the modern capitalist society new classes however have emerged with new condition of operation and new form of struggle between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production i.e., the 'haves') and the proletariat (i.e. the 'have-nots').

According to Marx, under capitalism wage labourers are paupers who grow more rapidly than the population and wealth. The essential conditions both for the existence and sway of the bourgeoisie class is the formation and augmentation of capital. "The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourer, due to completion, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, is its grave diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable (119)

9.2 Capitalism, Class Relations and Development

Modern industry has established the world market that has given immense scope of development to commerce, navigation and communication by land. These developments again have paved the way for the extension of industries and free trade.

The bourgeoisie class constantly maximises its profit through the expansion of new markets, introduction of new technology, extraction of surplus value and exploitation of the proletariat. However, along with these developments there emerge new forces of contradiction within the capitalist system. Notwithstanding the emergence of new forces of contradiction, the

bourgeoisie was very revolutionary in their outlook and action. According to Marx "The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part..... the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."

Through the exploitation of the world market the bourgeoisie has given the production and consumption process a cosmopolitan character. The old industries got destroyed. The old national industries got dislodged. Industry in the capitalist system no longer worked only on indigenous raw material but raw materials drawn from the remotest zones, whose products are consumed in every quarter of the globe. "In place of old wants satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature"(112).

The capitalists according to Marx also subjected nature to the force of man and machinery through the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraph, canalisation of rivers etc. All these facilitated the scope of free commodification of the economy at world scales. There also emerged free competition accompanied by social and political institutions to adopt to it.

The modern capitalist however, according to Marx, has inherited and nurtured the seeds of its destruction in its own womb. In proportion to the growth of the bourgeoisie there has emerged the modern working class — the proletariat "These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market." (114)

For Marx the essence of the capitalist is to maximize profit through commodification of the production process. As long as capitalism is based on private ownership of the means of production, it maximizes profit of the private producers. This profit is again maximised by exchange proceeding from money to money by way of commodity. Gradually the proceeds from money by way of commodity end up with more money than one had at the outset (Aron, 1965 : 128). To explain the sources of profit Marx talked about the theory of value, wage and surplus value. To him the value of any commodity is roughly proportional to the quantity of human labour contained in it. The wage capitalists pay to the workers as the compensation for the labour power the worker rents to the capitalist is equal to the amount necessary for the existence of the workers and their family to produce the merchandise for the capitalist. Under the capitalist system, workers receive the wage which is less than the actual duration of the work; that is less than the value of the commodity he or she produces. Here comes the notion of 'surplus value' which refers to 'the quantity of value produced by the workers beyond the necessary labour time'. Under the capitalist system the workers do not get the wage for the quantity of the value produced beyond the necessary labour time.

In return the wage received by a workman is restricted only to the means of his subsistence and survival. Marx calculated that the price of a commodity and therefore “also of labour is equal to its cost of production”. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of work increases the wage decreases. With the increase in the proportion of the use of machinery and division of labour the burden of toil of the labour also increases in terms of increase in the working hours, and increase in the quantum of work. “The proletariat is without property. His relation to his children and wife has no longer anything in common with the bourgeoisie family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjugation to capital, the same in England, as in France, in America and Germany, has tripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interest,” (118).

Gradually the number the proletariat also increases to gain more strength and awareness. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, artisans, peasants also join the army of the proletariat in their fight against the bourgeoisie. To Marx “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority.” And again Marx writes: In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat

9.3 Concept of Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to lawful and regular activity which could be justified on one or the other reasonable ground. For example, the use of public money for some legitimate purposes, legitimate reasons for one's absence from office or work and being born of persons legitimately related / married are such cases that give us some initial ideas about the use of this term legitimacy. In our daily life-experiences we come across several such cases when we accept the actions of others as correct, acceptable and justified. We normally do not question such actions of others. But sometimes we come across such instances when we think that the action of the others are not justifiable. When we begin to question the action of others, we get some vague idea of the term legitimacy. What right one has got to speak to us like this? Who is he to order us to do certain things? These are the questions that arise in our minds when we are not ready to accept other's actions, judgements or orders as such. It could be understood like what is the legitimate ground on which one is asking us to do certain favours. This question is related to the action of others, but sometimes questions are raised about one's status as well. A reference to the questions like this has already been made. People born out of the legitimate relationship like marriage are known as legitimate children. In this way the notion of legitimacy covers much wider area than with which we are normally concerned.

9.4 Why Legitimacy?

Throughout the world – in modern times as well as in history, the people or governments in power have attempted normally to justify their occupation of power over the people over whom they have ruled. The people in power

must be in a position to demonstrate that their occupation of power is legitimate as well. For example, in democratic countries the people who govern are elected on a regular basis. In such countries elections are held after a certain period of time and only the elected representatives can govern over the people. The people in power have always attempted to somehow justify their hold on certain privileged positions which includes rewards as well. They have been able to develop certain mechanisms through which they were able to justify their claims over their subordinates and the people in general. On the other hand, these subordinates also require some basis on which to accept the claims of their superiors. In this way legitimacy could resolve the possibilities of conflict between those who govern and those who are being governed. Legitimacy thus resolves the conflict between differing claims of people as it is important specially in those cases that are related to the distribution of power in society. As stated earlier, the scope for the issues centered around legitimacy is much wider than it apparently appears. A meaningful and scientific analysis of some of these issues is discussed in the sociological discourse.

9.5 Bases of Legitimacy: Traditional, Legal-Rational and Charismatic

The credit must go in favour of Max Weber a prominent sociologist from Germany, who not only identified the importance of the issues like legitimacy but also attempted to make a scientific analysis of it. After establishing legitimacy as an important issue for sociological analysis, Max Weber attempted to clarify the important bases of legitimacy. Max Weber identified three main bases of legitimacy namely, what he calls it, traditional, legal-rational and charismatic, Max Weber has also distinguished between power and authority. According to Max Weber, power refers to the capacity of the actor to carry out his will in spite of resistance. According to him legitimate power is called authority.

9.6 Traditional Authority

One could derive legitimacy on the basis of traditional grounds. Not very long back in history, several kings throughout the world ruled over the people on the basis of traditional authority. If the authority was derived on the traditional basis (as in the case of kings) then it was not generally questioned by the people. Several traditional legends and epics also supported the rule of the king as he was considered to be the representative of God. The basic understanding behind the rule of the king was like this: the king has been ordered by God to look after the welfare of its people.

Box 9.1: Ascribed Status

Apart from the king several village – chiefs in India also enjoyed this traditional authority. In India, traditional village-panchayats as well as caste-panchayats have displayed ample scope for traditional authority to flourish. Similarly there have been numerous cases of the tribal-chiefs in several parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. All such examples address to one central question. Why the rulers in earlier societies were able to rule over people without much problems and resistance from them? The answer is that these rulers used traditional basis of legitimacy to derive power and were able to morally justify their actions in the name of the welfare of the subordinate and disadvantaged categories of people. Traditional authority is also associated

with the ascribed status of most of its people in society. Who actually appointed one to occupy such a privileged position ? On what basis one issues certain orders that are to be followed by the most of the people ? These type of questions are generally avoided by the people and a major source of such a form of resolution of conflicts generally happens to be the prevalent traditional authority. Thus, if the power structure derives its legitimacy on traditional grounds, it is understood as a case of traditional authority.

9.7 Legal-Rational Authority

According to Max Weber, the second base of legitimacy is legal – rational. This type of authority has been found in almost all the modern societies of the world. It is also known as legal-rational authority. The most appropriate expression of such legal-rational authority could be what is now a days known as bureaucracy. Max Weber himself had identified bureaucracy as an important and emerging phenomenon throughout the world and himself made a conceptual analysis of it. Although some other scholars from other social-sciences as well later tried to understand the notion of bureaucracy in the changing scenario of the world, but due to the intellectual craftsmanship of Max Weber his formulations on bureaucracy still enjoy a commandable respect. In fact Max Weber's discussion involves much more than what is generally attributed to his formulations on bureaucracy. For example, Max Weber's formulations on bureaucracy includes what he calls it "ideal-type", modern organisations and his overall methodology of social-sciences. The basic idea here has been to understand how does bureaucracy get legitimacy in modern organisations on the grounds of legal-rational authority. Before proceeding further it seems necessary to clarify some opinions regarding bureaucracy.

Box 9.2: Ideal Type Bureaucracy

The notion of bureaucracy has been hailed as well as condemned by various scholars, academicians and political strategists. The discourses on bureaucracy also go beyond the academic discussions and several times its role has been questioned on political and moral grounds. On the basis of his understanding, particularly in the U.S.A., Max Weber constructed an ideal-type of bureaucracy which included eleven characteristics attached to it. A clarification seems necessary at this stage. Although Max Weber's notion of ideal-type is not being discussed here as such, but certain points about it must be kept in mind, since he discussed about ideal-type of bureaucracy.

First, it must be kept in mind that ideal-type has nothing to with the ideal conditions that are supposed to be achieved by any individual or organisation. Second, it was suggested by Max Weber that all the characteristics as they are stated to comprise bureaucracy are not to be found in any actually existing bureaucratic organisation. Third, the opposite of ideal-type is real-type which might actually be found in society. But as ideal-type received importance in the sociological literature, its counterpart real-type neither received importance nor it was used as such in the discipline at later stages of research. But then what was the need to construct the ideal-type. Max Weber believed that ideal-type is useful and could be constructed whenever we are dealing with unknown or less familiar situations.

Reflection and Action 9.1

What is the difference between charismatic and rational-legal authority.
Note down your answer in your notebook.

Max Weber has clarified the notion of legal-rational basis of legitimacy in detail. This legal-rational basis of legitimacy is realised through bureaucracy in modern organisations. At this stage the readers are advised to keep in mind, compare the contrast this type of legitimacy with its other types. The main characteristics of bureaucracy could be discussed in the following way.

- 1) In any bureaucratic organisation there are written rules which are followed by everyone from top to the bottom in a defined way. The work and orders related to it are given from those who are at the top of the organisation and are to be followed by those at the lower level. Bureaucracy involves a lot of work on paper, which means that no verbal orders could be given. Similarly only such orders could be given which are appropriate according to the rules. Meaning thereby that wrong orders could neither be given nor they are to be followed. The work and orders on paper reduce the chances of personal biases against each other. The idea behind such an organisation and style of work is that if the issues are correct and correspond to the existing state of laws then they should be completed. The aims of the perfect bureaucratic organization include the cases and not the people.
- 2) As bureaucratic organisations do their work on paper, it is done by its permanent employees. Rules of the office regulate recruitment of the staff and its promotions. The nature and working of such an organisation happens to be different from the individuals who comprise it. The idea behind such an organisation has been to ensure complete non-interference from any quarter, completely transparent and impersonal working.
- 3) Although Weber's work was concerned with the public bureaucracy his emphasis on rationality associated with it extended the use of this concept in the private sectors as well. Since Weber believed in the rational basis of legitimacy for both i.e. bureaucracy as well as the then emerging enterprises, it was to be hoped that bureaucracy might finally find a place in the private business organisations as well.
- 4) There seems to be a need to understand and examine this legal - rational form of legitimacy as it expressed through bureaucracy. In practice, however, certain characteristics which were contrary to the formulations of Max Weber were noted by some scholars. For example, the issues like misgovernance, incompetence, unnecessary paper work and frustration of people in bureaucracy have been referred by several scholars. These dysfunctions of bureaucracy have been referred in the case of capitalist as well socialistic type of governance - systems. But the credit of highlighting the legal-rational form of legitimacy and its analysis goes to Max Weber.

9.8 Charismatic Authority

Max Weber has defined it as the third basis of legitimacy. These grounds of acquiring legitimacy are quite different from the previous bases. Charismatic authority is based neither on traditional nor legal-rational basis. It is quite different from the two previously discussed bases of legitimacy. Charisma refers to certain qualities in a person which provide him something like a

spiritual grace or capacity to inspire others and fill in enthusiasm among the people. These are certain qualities that are not found in every type of personality-systems, they appear rarely among the people. Those who possess these qualities are generally able to garner support without much difficulty. They are able to lead the people on the basis of these rare qualities located within their personality-system and also due to their unique approach to tackle the problems of society. In this sense each Charismatic leader has got not only a unique personality system to convince others but also an approach that looks different from other previous approaches to solve the problems of society. If we attempt to analyse the relationship between a Charismatic leader and his followers, then we realise that this sort of a relationship itself is quite different from others.

Box 9.3: Personal Traits and Qualities

As a Charismatic leader thinks and delivers, his followers simply work deliberately according to the whims and wishes of their leader. On this basis the leader derives legitimacy for his words and action as people simply follow him without questioning him. We can understand it in other words as well. The personal traits and qualities in Charismatic leaders happen to be such that in a majority of cases they are capable enough to overpower the others particularly those who are his followers. It is like, if the Charismatic leader proposes something his followers are likely to second it immediately without asking for much. The followers of the Charismatic leader in fact keep him in high esteem and his personal qualities influence the followers in such a way that they generally agree to do anything for him. It reflects an unending, enduring and permanent sort of faith of the followers in their leader. The Charismatic leader on its part also seems capable of solving any problem, at least his followers believe it.

The followers believe in the Charismatic leader and don't generally attempt to distinguish between what is right or wrong about his approach. The Charismatic leader is actually able to inspire others who in turn develop a sort of faith in him which to a great extent is like a permanent one. Weber has expressed the optimistic point of view about the Charismatic sort of leadership. Accordingly, Charisma has been considered as a force which could challenge or question bureaucratic rigidity. For example, in the context of modern society a Charismatic leadership might critically examine the role of bureaucracy on particular issues like the child labour or human rights. Charismatic leadership presumes a set of belief – system which keeps intact the relationship between the leaders and his followers.

Reflection and Action 9.2

Outline the notion of charisma. How does charisma get reutilized? Write down your answer in a notebook.

Max Weber was of the opinion that it is possible for a leader to show his Charisma once, but it is not enough. Since the expectations of the followers gain new heights, the leadership in question gets compelled to show its Charisma once again. In fact the followers expect their leader to show his Charisma more than once. Once is not enough sort of situation generally engulfs the leader. These higher expectations of the followers compel the leader to think again and again and to work out for something new which could be considered as a functional equivalent to his own Charisma shown

earlier. And since his personality – system has certain unique attributes, sometimes he becomes able to show his Charisma again. Max Weber has identified process this 'routinisation of Charisma'. Without it one fails to remain and occupy the status of a Charismatic leader. T.K. Oommen has studied one such case of leadership in the context of the Indian society. According to him the role of Vinoba Bhave in the Bhoodan-Gramdam movement could be identified as that of a Charismatic leader. It was found in the study that the Charismatic leadership of Vinoba Bhave resulted in favour of the stability of the system but change in the approach, especially when certain powerful people donated their land willingly in favour of the poor people. Thus Charismatic authority refers to a unique sort of basis for legitimacy which is different from earlier discussed traditional and legal-rational bases of legitimacy.

9.9 Legitimacy and Social Changes

Although Max Weber referred to three bases of legitimacy, but society has undergone several changes since then. Max Weber's characterisation of legitimacy into three types resembles with his others conceptualisations as well and in a sense they could be considered as ideal or pure types. Max Weber's formulations, although included important bases of legitimacy, but his list of such bases might not be an exhaustive one. For example, in modern society another important base for legitimacy has been identified which is related to professional authority. There are people like doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, computer personnel and lawyers who specialise in their own jobs and undergo rigorous training and study for longer years to learn about their jobs. As a result of it, these professionals have a say of their own, they are free to take decisions in their specialised areas and for such an action they are quite competent to do so. Thus, the power acquired in such a way is known as professional authority and it derives legitimacy on the basis of specialisation achieved after a longer period of training. One example might be given here, it is the doctor who is capable to decide the type of treatment to be given to the patient. Such decision can't be taken by the people having traditional, legal-rational or Charismatic authority.

Now a days societies of the world are changing at a much faster pace than before. This period of change is also referred to as the period of transformation of societies. During this process of change, sometimes it becomes difficult for the people to understand various claims for legitimacy. At times we come across conflicting claims about legitimacy. For example, who must be the appropriate person to decide about the marriage of a boy in the Indian society happens to be one such important question. If the parents take the decision about the marriage then it is the case for traditional authority and if the boy himself takes the decision and decide to marry in the court of law then it is a case for legal-rational authority. A married couple could derive legitimacy of their relationship to each other either on traditional or on legal-rational basis. In the empirical situation sometimes we come across conflicting claims based upon different grounds for legitimacy. For example, regarding the decision of marriage conflicting claims might be seen between traditional and legal-rational basis of legitimacy. In the rapidly changing societies, sometimes it becomes difficult to really identify the real basis for legitimacy. The rapid changes that are taking place in the societies of the world have created such conditions where sometimes it becomes difficult to decide the grounds or bases of legitimacy. In the classical

sociological literature itself we come across discussions where societies could not really enjoy the fruits of development. Development of societies along with it have brought some undesirable conditions as well. For example.

Emile Durkheim has referred to 'pathological conditions of society'. Karl Marx has talked about 'alienation' in the capitalist society. These conditions provide the grounds for the crisis of legitimacy. Under such conditions sometimes one fails to decide on how to decide the legitimate grounds for actions. In modern societies, particularly in the case of the U.S.A., C. Wright Mills referred to the prevailing 'uneasiness' and 'indifference' in society which has emerged as a result of the threat on the existing values which itself are eroding fast. In simple words, whenever we come across some assertions like "Who are you to say so?" or "Who is he to issue orders like that", we could see the beginning of the emerging crisis of legitimacy. Whenever the older and known bases of legitimacy are questioned and new bases have not yet emerged, it could be identified as the situation referring to crisis of legitimacy. This crisis of legitimacy has been seen particularly in the case of the western countries, but some developing countries of the world might also see such conditions as emerging. Although the older grounds for legitimacy have been challenged in the modern society, but this resultant crisis of legitimacy could well be managed on the newer grounds of legitimacy. But one trend which could be seen as emerging throughout the world at the moment is that the area of legal-rational basis of legitimacy is increasing everyday.

9.10 Conclusion

The notion of legitimacy has got much wider applications than as it appears from its conceptual usages. In the changing era and in the new world order the notion of legitimacy has acquired newer meanings and wider applications. Some countries of the world have democratically elected governments and they derive legitimacy on the grounds of being elected by the people. Non-elected governments might face some problems at home and abroad as it might become increasingly difficult for them to derive the sort of legitimacy required to rule over the people. On the other hand people who wage an armed struggle against the state and terrorists groups do not enjoy legitimacy even though they claim like fighting for the cause of the people. In recent times all the terrorist – groups throughout the world have lost public support or sympathies and the public opinion has been built-up against their violent actions. In the modern political analysis, one significant question that has come up is concerned with the issues related with elections. Elections have acquired a new meaning and new dimensions in modern society. The issues like terrorism and organised violence are losing grounds in the modern polity. People in general and intellectuals in particular have been asking the questions like : Why these terrorist organisations can't contest elections ? In this way elections and elected governments have acquired the sort of legitimacy of which even the thought or idea was not possible just a century ago. Some international organisations like the Commonwealth of Nations accept the participation of only democratically elected governments as its legitimate member – states. The war against terrorism has acquired international dimensions. In modern political – analysis, thus the issues concerning legitimacy have acquired a new scope, meaning and dimensions. Similarly the international agreement on human rights and the establishment of various national human rights commissions in different nation states have given a new meaning to the quality of life. It sounds like that these human rights

should become the legitimate possession of the people and any violation against it whether it is by any individual, group or even state could be judged as a crime which is an illegitimate action. Such issues provide us an opportunity to understand the changing dimensions of the issues concerning legitimacy.

9.11 Further Reading

Weber, Max 1958, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Saribers

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