

Max-weber—

**Theory of social
stratification**

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A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Max Weber was born on 21 April 1864 in Erfurt, Saxony. His parents were from prosperous families. His father, also named Max, was a German lawyer and politician. The family lived in Berlin and his father was an important member of a middle-of-the-road party of the German Reichstag. Max Weber senior represented the National Liberal Party in the Imperial Parliament. While believing in constitutional democracy, senior Weber was authoritarian and sided with the 'iron rule' of the Chancellor Bismarck.

Weber studied jurisprudence at the University of Heidelberg and Berlin. He also did his military service and became a reserve officer of the army. With the degree in law he had his career in the courts and at the same time continued his studies in the fields of history of law and economics. Torn between the choices of whether to follow the career of a lawyer/civil servant or to opt for an academic vocation, Weber finally joined academics — first at Freiburg and later at the University of Heidelberg.

order.

Max Weber's concept of social class status and authority is more economy oriented than anything else. According to Max Weber, it is the economic and the social practice that determines the class. In order to have a clear idea about social class and order, we shall have an idea about his 'concept of power'. According to Max Weber, "Power is nothing but the chance of a man or

a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."

According to Max Weber, power yields confidence in a man (of course who possesses that power) that he shall be able to realise his ends in a proper manner, as against those who do not possess any power. According to Max Weber, power is of two kinds : (a) Economically conditioned power, and (b) Power as such.

As a result of economically conditioned power, we acquire riches and wealth. Power as such has nothing to do with money. A person may not be rich, but still he may be having social honour and political or economic power. Max Weber thinks that it is the social honour that determines social order. In this respect, he has said : "The way in which social honour is distributed in a community between typical groups participating in this distribution we call the 'social order'."

Types of Social Order—According to Max Weber, social order is of the following three types :

- (a) Social order,
- (b) Economic order, and
- (c) Legal order.

(a) Social Order—There is difference between social order and the economic order. Social order determines and is determined by the economic order. It is under the social order that there are status groups. Social honour is a part of the social order.

(b) Economic Order—This order determines distribution of the economic opportunities and services. It does not necessarily carry with it the element of social honour or order. Of course, it determines the class because class is always a economic group.

(c) Legal Order—Economic as well as social order are equally related to legal order. This order determines constitutional status of a particular order.

Class—According to Max Weber, it is the economic order that is responsible for distribution of economic groups and the services. Class is governed by the economic factor. Weber's concept of class is basically economic. It is determined by social opportunities as determined by economic conditions. According to Max Weber, "When a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as this component is represented exclusively by economic interest in the position of goods and opportunities for income and thirdly is represented under the conditions of the community or labour market." We have a class. It may further be explained by the following words of Weber :

“ ‘Property’ and ‘lack of property’ are therefore the basic categories of class situation.”

Characteristics of a Class—Class, according to Max Weber, is determined by the following 3 characteristics as we have seen in the definition of the class given above :

- (1) A number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances,
- (2) This component is represented exclusively by economic interests and the position of goods and opportunities for income,
- (3) It is represented under the conditions of the community or labour market.

According to Max Weber, class is determined by economic groups and economic chances. It is the distribution of the goods and the chances that provides a man with life chances. Those who have property are able to acquire more goods and get more opportunities and thereby have greater sources of income. On the other hand, who do not possess all these things, have lesser chances.

Division of the Class—Weber has also divided the classes particularly the economic classes, of course on the basis of the kind of property owned and the kind of service that a group offers in the market, into two categories :

- (1) The class that owns property, and
- (2) The class that earns its livelihood by labour.

In this respect, Max Weber is nearer to the class theory Karl Max. The class according to Weber that owns property, according to Marx is the capitalist class or Bourgeoisie and the class that does not possess any property and only offers the labour in market, is the Proletariat or the working class. Max Weber has in this respect said :

“Those who have no property but who offer services, are differentiated just as much according to their kinds of services according to the way in which they make use of their services in a continuous or discontinuous relation to recipient.”

Determination of Class Situation by Market Situation

Classes are not communities. They merely represent possible and frequent communal (collective/communitarian) action. According to Weber, we may speak of class when:

1. a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances;
2. in so far as, this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income; and
3. further, it is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets.

These three points refer to a "class situation". It implies the following points:

1. The typical chance for supply of goods.
2. External living conditions.
3. Personal life experiences.

Weber's Concept of Authority—While talking about social order and social action, Max Weber has also talked of 'authority.' This authority has vital relationship with social control. According to Max Weber, the authority is of the following three types :

- (1) Legal authority or intellectual authority,
- (2) Traditional authority, and
- (3) Charismatic authority.

(1) Legal Authority or Intellectual Authority—The State creates certain offices and positions in order to exercise certain control. Those who occupy these offices have to follow certain rules and regulations so that they should be able to discharge their duties. In other words, they have two positions, first their personal in which they are free to do as they like, and the second one their official position in which they have to work according to certain rules and regulations. According to Weber, because of the legal authority they are given the opportunity to use certain economic goods or special goods and utilise certain property. These specific goods and property are means of administration. They are not their personal property but they have the right to use them.

(2) Traditional Authority—Tradition is an important factor that determines the human behaviour. Because of tradition, people have to work according to certain norms. Faith in these norms is called 'traditional faith'. Authority that is placed on tradition, called the 'traditional authority'. For example, the father or husband is the head of a family and he exercises control over other members. The authority on the basis of which he does all this, is his traditional authority.

(3) Charismatic Authority—This type of authority is present in an individual by his ownself. This authority may be real as well imposed. The Divine Origin Theory is an example of this Charismatic authority. According to this theory, the king represents the

Almighty God. Similarly, the warrior, leaders of certain religious sect and prophets are endowed with Charismatic authority. Certain individuals may because of their display of super-natural power, be said to enjoy this Charismatic authority. This authority cannot be explained on the basis of tradition or law. It is an authority of its own.

Guarantees of Status Stratification

Status honour is normally expressed by a specific style of life. Linked with this are restrictions on social intercourse, which is not subservient to economic status. *Status circle* is evident through marriages. Visits to streets, neighbourhoods, groups, etc., are examples of encircling of status groups. Further, Weber observes that the development of status is essentially a question of stratification resting upon usurpation. Such usurpation is the normal origin of almost all status honour. Stability of a system of status stratification comes from legally sanctioned social order.

Weber cites example of "caste" as a status group. Status distinctions are guaranteed not merely by conventions and laws, but also by *rituals*. Castes are status groups, and there is a combination of *ideal* and *material* factors in caste. Each caste has a style of life of its own. Weber says that the decisive role of a "style of life" in "status honour" means that status groups are the specific bearers of all "conventions". "Stylization" of life originates from status groups.

"Classes" are stratified according to the principles of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special "styles of life". An

"occupational group" is also a status group. For example, Brahmins are a status group as they perform priestly functions. However, technological change and economic transformation threaten stratification by status pushing the class situation into the foreground.

Power (Parties)

"Classes" are found in economic order, "status groups" are seen in the sphere of the distribution of honour, and these two influence each other, and also the legal order, and are influenced by it. But "parties" live in a house of power. Thus, Weber asserts autonomy and interdependence of class, status and power.

Weber emphasizes on the struggle for the means of "political rule". State enjoys monopoly of power. Like Marx, Weber brings ideological phenomena into some correlation with the material interests of economic and political orders. Weber has a keen eye for "rationalizations", reflected in his concept of "ideal type", action, bureaucracy, capitalism, etc. Weber talks of both "interests" and "ideologies" with equal emphasis. For Weber, modern capitalism is not irrational, it is very embodiment of rationality.

“Weber is more radical than Marx because the inescapable logical and necessity of the technological rational development of the modern world is valid and faithful for socialism as it is for the capitalist world. He is more realistic than Marx because he does not see any hope for the world of freedom under the conditions of the technical rationalism with the density of the modern world. For this reason, we may call Weber the Bourgeoisie Marx.”

Whatever weakness Max Weber may have and whatever strong points he may have, it cannot be denied that he made a very valuable contribution to the field of sociology and social thought. He tried to give the methodology of sociology a scientific base and an objective outlook. These things did carry sociology forward to a very great extent.