

**Classical Sociology Theory**  
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**Lecture No. 18**  
**Historical Materialism**


Welcome back to the today's session and in this class, we are discussing one of the central theoretical arguments of Karl Marx, known as Historical Materialism. I hope you remember that in the previous class, we discussed the intellectual influences on Karl Marx. We spent some time trying to understand what further dominant theoretical or intellectual streams of thought or who were the eminent intellectuals or thinkers who influence the development of Marxian thought.

We discussed about Anarchists, young Hegelians and about Hegel in detail. We found out that like every other intellectuals, Marx was also heavily influenced by the kind of intellectual orientation of his time. He very fiercely engaged with some of the intellectual currents of his time, fought with them, quarrelled with them and then came up with his own arguments.

One of the most central thesis of Marxian Theory is his argument about Historical Materialism. As we discussed in the previous class, he borrowed the framework of dialectics from Hegel, but rejected the framework of Idealism. So, Historical Materialism is also sometimes called as Dialectical Materialism because he is using the framework of Dialectics and used that framework to explain the material conditions of the world. Whereas Hegel used the framework of Dialectics to explain the conditions of Ideas and addressed how ideas evolve, how ideas evolve from one state to the other through the process of Dialectics.

Whereas Marx was extremely critical of the emphasize Hegel given to ideas and rejected it and then argued that the matter or the material has primacy over the ideas. Marx then argued that you need to develop a theory to explain how material conditions underwent transformation over a period in time by incorporating methodology of dialectics.

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- Marx had both an empirical theory of history and a speculative philosophy of history. The former, which has come to be known as historical materialism, is a set of macrosociological generalizations about the causes of stability and change in societies. The latter, largely of Hegelian inspiration, offers a scheme for interpreting all historical events in terms of their contribution to realizing the end of history - in both senses of that term.
  - Based on materialist conception of the world, human history as the history of human labour and class struggles
  - Explained through the frameworks of dialectics, inspired by Hegel
  - Explained the past, predicted the future
  - Provided a host of conceptual tools to understand processes of labour, social structure, social change and so on



Therefore Marx had both an empirical theory of history and a speculative philosophy of history. So, what does it mean? Every Historian in the true sense of the word provides you an empirical account of history. They provide you an account about how human society evolved or changed over a period in time and pay attention to the actual empirical historical facts? So, Marx exactly provides such kind of an account. He was a historian who provided you with a very reliable and empirically enabled factual historical account like any other historian.

At the same time, he also provided a speculative philosophy of history. Like any other philosopher, who can speculate, theorise and involve in predictive statements, Marx also did that. Therefore, Marxian history has this dual characters. The former which has come to be known as historical materialism, is a set of macro sociological generalizations about the cause of stability and change in societies.

As we will see, Marx has a very fascinating account about how societies transform from that of primitive communism where human beings lived as hunters and gatherers, to that of slavery, to feudalism and to capitalism and finally he predicted that human beings will move to a state of socialism and finally that of communism. So, that is a macro sociological generalization. The latter, largely of Hegelian inspiration, offers a scheme of interpreting all historical events in terms of their contribution to realizing end of history in both sense of the term.

End of history as for Hegel, is when the western civilisation during his time reached the zenith of human progress because they have identified reason and Hegel believed that the

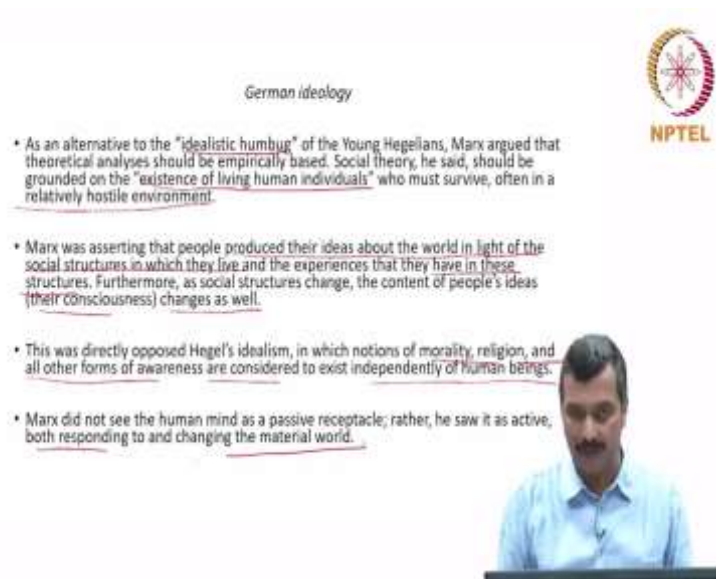
people of his time have reached the zenith of progress. They have reached the top and also as the dead end of the history. But on the contrary, Marx's materialist conception of human history is the history of human labour and class struggles. Now, from here onwards we are no longer discussing Marxian engagement with Hegel, but we will attempt to understand what the original arguments of Marx about social change are.

Based on materialist conception of the world, human history has to be seen as the history of human labour and class struggle. It is the fundamental thesis of Marxian thought. You cannot understand human history without taking into account the central role played by the human labour and conflicts in the form of class struggle. The hitherto existing history is a history of class struggle. It is a very famous quote from Karl Marx. So, he understood human history so far as a relentless continuation of class struggles.

Marx explained history through the framework of dialectics, inspired by Hegel as we discussed earlier. He explained the past and based on it, predicted the future. And very interestingly as you know, that prediction did not come true. As I told you, it was a Meta theory that Marx presented. It was a theory that was supposedly capable of explaining every society and explaining the transition of human society from the most elementary form to that of his contemporary times and then he predicted its course in the future.

But that did not come true because Marx predicted the collapse of capitalism and Marx predicted the emergence of communism as the ultimate state of affairs and we know that did not really take place. In the course of doing that, Marx provided a host of conceptual tools to understand the process of labour, social structure, social change and so on. So, you will come across a host of concepts and terms and terminology that Marx developed. Those are very powerful terms to describe the process of labour. He talks about labour power, surplus labour and host of other terms and terminologies in in each of these disciplines. whether it is in history or political science or in Economics and social structure and social change and so on.


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German ideology

- As an alternative to the "idealistic humbug" of the Young Hegelians, Marx argued that theoretical analyses should be empirically based. Social theory, he said, should be grounded on the "existence of living human individuals" who must survive, often in a relatively hostile environment.
- Marx was asserting that people produced their ideas about the world in light of the social structures in which they live and the experiences that they have in these structures. Furthermore, as social structures change, the content of people's ideas (their consciousness) changes as well.
- This was directly opposed Hegel's idealism, in which notions of morality, religion, and all other forms of awareness are considered to exist independently of human beings.
- Marx did not see the human mind as a passive receptacle; rather, he saw it as active, both responding to and changing the material world.

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Now we will discuss Marx's work, 'German Ideology' because it is in this work that he most systematically brings out his argument about historical materialism. Now, as an alternative to the Idealistic humbug which he characterizes off in Hegelians, Marx argued that theoretical analysis should be empirically based. He was kind of fed up with the arguments by young Hegelians, which completely revolved around the realm of ideas with scant regard to the empirical reality in which they lived.

Social theory, he said, should be grounded on the existence of living human individuals who must survive, often in a relatively hostile environment. So, without looking into the reality that is unfolding in front of you, without looking into the into the real world in which actual people live and die; any amount of philosophical thinking only becomes an intellectual pass time. It becomes a pass time of the individuals as per Marx. Marx was fed up and he very mercilessly discarded, and out rightly critiqued the idealistic orientation of the young Hegelians.

Marx was asserting that people produced their ideas about the world in the light of social structure in which they live. It is a beautiful and extremely important argument. Your ideas about the world are many times a reflection of the social structure, or the society in which you live. Furthermore, as the social structures change, the content of people's ideas, their consciousness changes as well and it is not the other way around. Here you see a kind of a completely contrary position to that of idealists.

Idealists argued that it is on the basis of ideas that people create the society. Whereas Marx argues that, your ideas undergo changes in different social epochs because these ideas are products of different social settings. These ideas are the products of different social structures in which people live. So, unless you pay attention to the actual social setting; unless you very carefully understand and analyse and theorise the empirical reality of human beings, you will not be able to understand why certain ideas emerged only in certain periods in time. Why certain ideas are possible in certain periods in time?

For example, he would argue that the idea of individual liberty, idea of capitalism, idea of justice, idea of democracy could not have been emerged in a period of slavery. It could not have been emerged in a period of feudalism because the material conditions were not favourable to that. We will come to such fascinating arguments in the later classes. So, this was directly opposed to Hegel's idealism, in which notions of morality, religion and all other forms of awareness are considered to exist independently of human beings. As something that we discussed because Hegel argues that these ideas are not created by human beings but rather they are extremely important.

Marx did not see the human mind as a passive receptacle; rather he saw it as active, both responding to and changing the material world. So, we know that Marx believed that human beings are the actual agents of change. Human mind is not a passive receptacle. It is an actual agent that has the ability to change the world.

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- Material factors, especially the production and reproduction of existence through labor, are the driving power in people's lives. The problems facing any society are inseparable from the organization of the labor process. Marx states: "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life." To understand any society it is necessary to grasp the labor process, the ways in which people transform nature through work. Labor fundamentally shapes people's identities, their sense of who they are.
- Human history is the process of people producing their material lives. Labor produces a "definite mode of life," and human nature is dependent on the material conditions of production. The labor process is socially organized in distinct ways in different societies.



Material factors, especially the production and reproduction of existence through labour are the driving power in people's lives. The problems facing any society are inseparable from the organisation of labour process. Marx states life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by Life. This is an extremely important and central argument of Marx. Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life.

To understand any society, it is necessary to grasp the labour process, the ways in which people transform nature through work. Labour fundamentally shapes peoples identities, their sense of who they are. This is an important point you need to keep in mind because this is something so central and foundational in Marxian argument. Whether, you need to understand his argument about religion or his argument about capitalism, his argument about alienation or his argument about any other Marxian theory, this is a central argument. Why Marx gives so much of importance to human labour?

It is something so central not only in providing him with all the basic necessities but this is something so central for a human being to define the human character of that person. Human history is the process of people producing their material lives. Labour produces a definite mode of life and human nature is dependent on the material conditions of productions. The labour process is socially organized in distinct ways in different societies.

Marx is inviting our attention to look at a central process of human existence. How do people produce things that are necessary for them and how do you understand it historically? This is the simple question that Marx asked. You know that when Marx was talking about his contemporary time, he is talking about a developed capitalist industrial society; beginning of early capitalism in Europe. So, here he is asking this question; is it how things were produced throughout the history?

Then the definite answer is no. You know that if you look at the history, archaeology, theory of evolution; human beings have evolved over a period of time. They started their life as hunters and gatherers. They did not know agriculture, did not know the use of fire; later they started cultivation, they started rearing of animals and later they settled down in certain places.


Then then the kind of a gradual growth of human societies in different directions and Marx argued that in order to understand all this transformation, you need to understand how the process of production was transformed. How the process of production underwent subsequent

changes without understanding that you will not understand human history. Ideas will give you only partial explanation because ideas were not the kind of propelling force. The propelling force was the kind of different modes of production.


We will look at the concept of Mode of production, analyse its definition in sometime down the line. Marx is arguing that a definite mode of life is with specific material conditions of production. The labour process is socially organised in distinct ways in different societies. So, how is this labour is socially organised?

This is a central concern of Marx. How the production is socially organised, how societies evolve its mechanism to organise production. How do different people fulfil their role in the process of production? Who decides what? What kind of work is involved by what kinds of people and that is something important for a Marxian analysis.

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- Every type of productive system presupposes a set of social relations as well as a particular approach to mastering nature. The reproduction of a people through labor is not accomplished by isolated individuals, but by members of a society.
- As the arrangement of labor becomes more complex, a division of labor emerges. The division of labor distributes the conditions of labour (the tools and materials) into different, unequal groups.
- It promotes a more efficient economic system that allows a surplus to be created beyond that needed for subsistence. When a surplus develops, one group can live off the labor of another, akin to the master's dominion over the slave.



Every type of productive system presupposes a set of social relations as well as a particular approach to mastering nature. Marx classifies history on the basis of different modes of production. He talks about slavery, he talks about feudalism, he talks about capitalism, he has not elaborated communism but he thinks about it and he has an elaborate discussion about Asiatic mode of production as a definitely different set of mode of production.

Every productive system presupposes a set of social relations as well as a particular approach to mastering nature. The reproduction of a people through labour is not accompanied by isolated individuals but by members of a society. So, you cannot really decide how you involve in this process of production. You have very little autonomy in that; rather it is a

socially defined position. It is a socially defined process and your individual choice is very little as you have no stake in that.

As the arrangement of labour becomes more complex, a division of labour emerges. The division of labour distributes the conditions of labour such as the tools and materials into different, unequal groups. This particular argument about division of labour is again a very important category in socio-logical theory. We will come across an elaborate discussion on division of labour, when we discuss Emile Durkheim because his theory of social change is also centred around this idea of division of labour.

Marx argues that when human beings become more and more complex and when they grow in size; a division of labour emerges and the division of labour distributes the conditions of labour such as the tools and materials into different, unequal groups. When we talk about a primitive society where the people at their very early stages of their human evolution, their life was very simple and there was hardly any division of labour.

Everybody does almost every work together because hunting and gathering food is the fundamental or is the most important job because they have to look for food for every day as they do not cultivate or do not store any food. Every day's hunger needs to be met, so every person irrespective of the gender is involved in the process of finding food. But that situation changes over a period in time and they become more and more prosperous in terms of material condition when they have identified agriculture, able to stock food, able to produce more than what they require for their immediate consumption then the division of labour reaches the next level.

In contemporary times, only a very few sections of people especially in industrial societies are involved in the direct production of food and other material. A vast majority of others are engaged in a host of other specialised activities. You know that how many of us are actually involved in the process of production of food, very few of us. A lot of other people are engaged in other specialised activities.

Marx is talking about how this transformation takes place to a situation in which certain people are engaged in certain activities and what defines their situation is something central in understanding the history of human society. It promotes a more efficient economic system, and the division of labour promotes a more efficient economic system that allows a surplus to



be created beyond the needs of subsistence. When surplus develops one group can live off the labour of others, akin to the master's domination over the slave.

It is a very important argument. As we discussed, in a hunting-gathering society, everybody needs to work but the moment you discover agriculture, where you can cultivate your food grains more efficiently and produce more, everybody does not have to work in the field. Then this division of labour also creates a kind of a surplus so that a group of people can live off the labour of others.

So, that is the time when human society has evolved into the direction of having specialisations. For example, teachers as an exclusive category of people or priests as an exclusive category of people or various artisans, various artists or musicians. So, these people began to emerge as independent categories because they do not need to really work in the field. There are other people who are working in the field and these people can engage in certain other thing and they can live off the labour of another, akin to the master's domination over the slave.

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- Classes arise when the surplus of goods produced by the division of labor can be controlled by a minority of people.
- Any community in which an elite possesses the surplus is an unequal society. Further, the ways in which a ruling group extracts the surplus from another class provides insights into the type of inequality and exploitation generated in that society.
- This inequality results in the growth of antagonism, will ultimately lead to social conflict and the whole society will move to the next level where again the same dialectical will take place until the era of communism where the state will wither away and a class-less society will take shape.



Classes arise when the surplus of goods produced by the division of labour can be controlled by a minority of people; this is an extremely important argument of Marx. In an egalitarian society, there won't be any class divisions. There could be a very few instances of status division maybe the chief or the priest of that tribe might enjoy a higher status or the elderly person might enjoy higher status but otherwise economic class does not simply exist in primitive societies.

Maybe in a very limited sense of somebody who owns more cattle or something like that but it is no way comparable with the kind of emergence of class divisions that human society has seen in the subsequent situations. So, class arise when the surplus of goods produced by a division of labour can be controlled by a minority of people. Any community in which an elite possesses the surplus is an unequal society. Further, the ways in which the ruling group extracts the surplus from another class provides insights into type of inequality and exploitation generated in the society.

Here, Marx is bringing in into the fore, the kind of unequal relationship between different set of people in different periods in history. For example during slavery, the master owns the slaves. The slave is a property of the master just like any other physical property; he can be sold, he can be brought, he can be disposed off, he can be killed. Even the very human existence of that slave is denied, whereas that situation is completely different in a feudal society and later in a capital society.

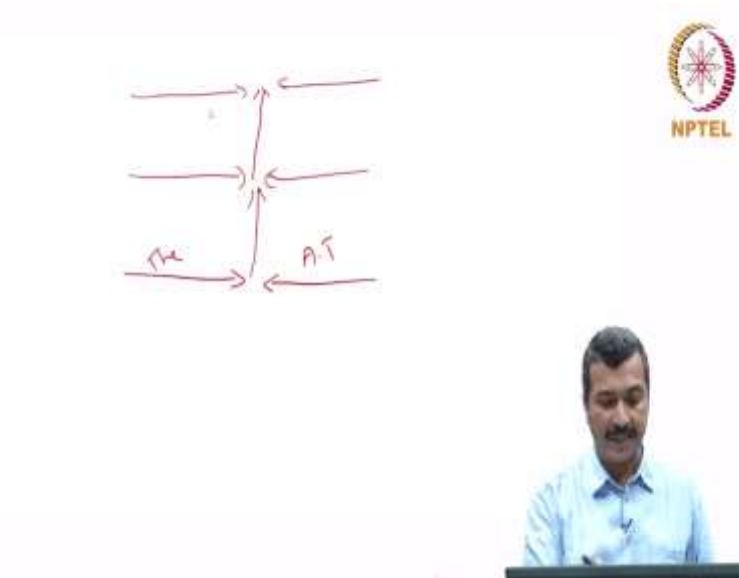
In a capital society, the capitalist only buys the labour whereas the labourer himself or herself is a free agent. So, now this relation between the group of people who engaged in productive activities and the people who can live off the surplus of people and the relation between them is something very different as well as defining according to Marx. This inequality results in the growth of antagonism which ultimately lead to social conflicts and the whole society will move to the next level, where again the same dialectical relationship will take place until the era of communism where the state will wither away and a class less society will take emerge; this is the argument of Marx.

The entire human history according to Marx is the history of class struggle because from the system of slavery to feudalism to capitalism and to communism, this transition from one state to other takes place because of the antagonism between classes. That happens in a dialectical manner because every historical stage has its own contradictions. Each historical stages such as slavery or feudalism has opposing ideas or contradictions in itself which leads to a conflict. The contradictions within feudalism leads to that off capitalism which again has its own seeds of opposite ideas or contradiction which leads to a kind of completely qualitatively different one that of communism.

Though Marx argued this, he has not properly elaborated how a communist society will become class less society and how state will wither away. He even argued for a dictatorship

of the proletariat, a term which he has not really elaborated and therefore lead to lot of speculation and formulation by other scholars.

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The process of dialectics goes like this, you have contradictory ideas, you have a thesis and an anti-thesis and their contradiction leads to a qualitatively different state which again has this opposite ideas or contradiction in built, which again leads to a higher nut qualitatively different one which again has this opposite ideas. Hegel calls it negation of the negation and it leads to the other one and in Marxian terms, it is thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis and which again leads to thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis and finally reaches to the higher stage of history that Marx called as communism.

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Now, in order to understand how Marx explains this, we need to understand Marxian idea of social structure. It is an extremely important aspect where Marx talks in detail, and he presents a very simple yet very powerful argument. Marx conceived the society as constituting a base and a super structure. This model; the base and super structure model is an extremely famous model and very central to the Marxian understanding of social structure.

He conceives that every social structure as composed of two elements; one a base, the foundation on which the other, super structure is built. It is similar to the structure of a house where there is a foundation and then there is a super structure. What are the elements that constitute this base and the super structure? For Marx, the base is composed of the economy; and he is very clear about. It is the realm of production which he also calls as the mode of production.


As we discussed how, a socially organised productive process emerges and that determines how different people in the society are engaged in the process of production in a definitive way. So, that constitutes a base and the super structure is almost everything else, including politics, law, literature, ethics, ideology or social norms. Everything else that you identify in a society are put together in this idea of super structure. Because of the very nature of base and super structure, it is understood that the economy, the base is seen as the most important one.

What is the connection between the base and the super structure? Is it a one sided or does Marx talks about reciprocal relationship between super structure and base; these are heavily contested arguments. We will take them up later, when we discuss the session on ideology.


However, a more conventional Marxian theory would argue as the enormous influence that the base exerts on the super structure is more important. Whether Marx himself conceived it in such an economic deterministic way is again a controversial issue.

The moment you use the word determines, it provides kind of an absolutist sense. Whether Marx meant the term 'determines' or the word 'shapes' is a matter of debate between different stands of Marxist thought.

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- The primacy of the economic—is the core idea of his materialistic perspective. By *economic* he means specifically the organization of productive activity, how people come together to satisfy their needs for food, shelter, and clothing. Marx calls this economic assemblage the "mode of production."
- As humanbeings we make our lives and express ourselves through labor, through our collective interaction with nature. Unlike non-human animals, Marx observes, we must consciously produce our "means of subsistence." In the study of human history, therefore, the process of production is the appropriate starting point

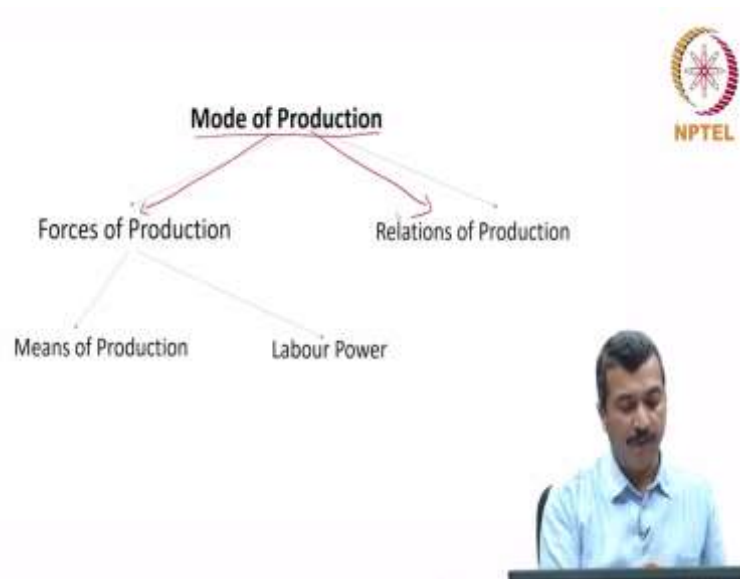


However Marx gives primacy to the economic aspect, which is the core idea of his materialistic perspective of history and society as we discussed earlier. Because for Marx, the realm of economy and production is central to human existence. By economy, he specifically means the organisation of productive activity. How people come together to satisfy their needs for food, shelter and clothing? Marx calls this economic assemblage as the mode of production.

How people produced the basic things in different epochs in history? As human beings, we make our lives and express ourselves through labour. Marx observes that through our collective interaction with nature, unlike nonhuman beings, we must consciously produce our means of subsistence. In the study of human history, therefore the process of production is the appropriate starting point. As we mentioned earlier, one of the most unique things that distinguishes human beings from other animals is our ability to produce our means of subsistence.

We are not dependent and we know how to produce our own means of subsistence and in fact we produce much more than our basic needs. That is why we, human beings as a species is able to make so much of progress in its life in comparison with others.

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Now we are beginning to introduce a set of concepts. It is very important that you understand this consequences because the kind, these terms will come again and again in the discussion of Marxian terminology. One of the fundamental terms is the mode of production as we discussed the very definitive arrangement of production; how a society arranges its people into specific form of production. Socially form of organised production and as per Marxian argument this is very definitive to the definitive periods in history.

You do not have a single mode of production that start from the beginning of human civilisation to that of the contemporary times. You have different and specific modes of production and again this is a hugely debated area; exactly how many modes of production that Marx identified, it is a hugely debated and contested area; I am not going into those controversies. Marx identified two primary elements of modes of production; one is the forces of production and the other one is relations of production. Now, this forces of production is again sub divided into two; one is the means of production and the second one is the labour power.

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• **Mode of Production** generally denotes a discernible economic order, one defined by the manner in which humans mobilize the labor necessary to fulfill their basic needs.

• Several different modes of production have appeared throughout history, including slavery, feudalism, and capitalism.

• **Mode of Production** is composed of two factors: **Forces of Production** and **Relations of Production**

• **Relations of Production**: the social framework within which economic activity is carried out.



Now, mode of production generally denotes a discernible economic order, one defined by the manner in which human beings mobilize the labour necessary to fulfil their basic needs. Something that we elaborated earlier; how human beings are defined by the manner in which human beings mobilize the labour that is necessary to fulfil their basic needs. How do they socially organize, who does what, is determined by the nature of mode of production; so there are several different modes of production that have appeared throughout history including slavery, feudalism and capitalism.


Marx speaks about Asiatic mode of production which again created a lot of controversy on the question saying that whether Asiatic mode of production is something so unique to this particular region or not. There has been several debates and controversies on how Asiatic Mode of Production fit into a Marxian schema of history. Mode of production is composed of two factors; forces of production and relations of production as we showed in that diagram. Relations of production is a social framework within which economic activity is carried out.

We came across here that the relations of production talk about the social framework within which the economic activity is carried out. What is the kind of a social relationship between people who are involved in productive activity? Is everybody, does the same thing or is there is division of labour? If there is division of labour, who does what kind of work and what is the kind of a social relationship between the people who actually work and the people who control them.

What is the relationship between the people who actually work on the field, for example imagine a slave society where the slaves are the people who actually put in their manual

work. What is the relation between them and the workers in a capitalist society? In capitalism, a factory owner who employs workers does not own the labourers, instead he actually pays them for their labour power. So, what is a kind of a social relationship between the people who actually work and people who do not use their physical labour?

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- **Forces of Production** has two components: **Means of Production and Labour Power**
  - **Means of Production** include land, tools, machinery, and raw materials.
  - **Labour Power** indicates varying forms of productivity according to the skills, expertise, and technical know-how of the workforce. Heavily dependent on technological advancements



Now, forces of production which is an important component of a mode of production has two components; one is means of production and other one is labour power. Means of production includes almost every material aspects that are necessary for the process of production; which includes land, tools, machinery and raw materials. This differs from time to time as well. In an agricultural society, land is the most important means of production.

In earlier mode of productions, ne required mostly physical tools and when you move to that of a capital society; land is not significant but whereas machinery and factory becomes important and raw materials are important. When you move to a contemporary society which is characterized by service economy, you do not really require land or factory where you work in offices, in computers, on data and that becomes your raw materials.

Every stage has its own set of means of production and the labour power which is another constituent aspect is indicative of various forms of productivity according to the skills, expertise and technical know-how of the workforce that is heavily dependent on the technological advancements. We know that the very term labour does not tell you anything, as a person who is working in an analytical firm or in a software company uses his labour but that is completely different from a labourer who works on the field, using his physical labour.



The quality of labour power is heavily influenced by technological advancements. We hear about enhanced skilled labour, semi skilled labour, expert labour and all these things are important here.

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- Each Mode of Production creates the entire configuration of a society, engendering a "definite mode of life."
- What individuals are, Marx asserts, depends on the material conditions of production, on "what they produce and how they produce." In transforming the natural world through labor, individuals also transform themselves, changing their own nature, developing "new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language."
- On the basis of this economic structure, partly due to the power of the dominant class, there arises a corresponding "legal and political superstructure" and "forms of social consciousness."



Each mode of production creates the entire configuration of a society engendering a definite mode of life. So, Marxian argument is very interesting, fascinating, and convincing to a large extent because he argues that each of these mode of production produces a definite mode of life. Why that is your life and social organisation at the time of slavery is quite different from the way in which you live in a capitalist society. Is it because the ideas are different? No, according to Marx. Ideas are of course different, but they are the products of the changes in the productive forces.

Marx assert that what individuals are depend on the material conditions of production such as the way in which they produce and how they produce. In transforming the natural world through labour, individuals also transform themselves, changing their own nature, developing new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language. So, Marx does not have a singular idea of humanity or singular idea of human beings which are unchanging from the beginning to that of the end, to that of the contemporary times.

Therefore, Marx argues that human beings change, their needs change, their outlook change, their ideas change, depending upon in which time period they are located in, which productive process they are implicated in, and that is a powerful argument. That is an extremely powerful argument. On the basis of this economic structure, partly due to the

power of the dominant class, there arise a corresponding legal and political superstructure and the forms of social consciousness. So, we go back to this particular structure again.

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Marx argues that politics, law, ideology, social norms and literature, and the sense of what is good, what is bad, and the sense of your consciousness are all part of this super structure, and is a product of your mode of production. It is a product of the character of the economic activity that you are in. In that sense, Marx gives complete autonomy to this particular base and then argues that this heavily influences or almost determines the kind of ideas and arguments that we develop.

The modern laws, Marx would argue, could not have emerged at the time of slavery. The idea of human rights, the idea of individual rights, the idea of democracy, the idea of somebody choosing his or her own ruler could not have been emerged in the time of slavery.

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• The cultural beliefs and social institutions making up the superstructure, according to Marx, including the state itself, typically function to stabilize the relations of production, promote the interests of the dominant class, and lend political and intellectual support to the existing economic system.

• "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas." : German Ideology



The cultural beliefs and social institutions make up the super structure according to the Marx including the state itself that typically function to stabilize the relations of productions, promote the interests of the dominant class and lend political and intellectual support to the existing economic system. This is another powerful argument. It is not that economic base simply produces the corresponding legal and social super structure but it has a clear bias.

It has a clear bias in favour of the dominant class because within economy the classes are not equal, the slaves and masters were not equal, the feudal serves and the lords were not equal, and the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie and proletariat were not equal. So, Marx would argue that the super structure that is built on each of these specific modes of production is also not neutral rather they are built to favour the powerful group in the respective economic era.


They promote the interest of the dominant class and lend political and intellectual support to the existing economic system. This is the point where Marx becomes extremely critical of each of these stages and more so with that of capitalist system. When we take up his discussion on state, it becomes very apparent that Marx understands state as really incapable of protecting the interest of the proletariat. He understands state as an entity that is by default supports and protects interest of the Bourgeoisie.

Here is a quote again from 'The German Ideology', 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch are the ruling ideas'. It is a very powerful argument, you can just think about it. Why that we find certain ideas are as very convincing? Marx would argue that, the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch are the ruling ideas. It means that the class which is the ruling material forces of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force as well. The class

which has the means of material production at its disposal has the control at the same time over the means of mental production.

Thereby generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subjected to subordination. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships. The dominant material relationships are grasped as dominant, which is a very powerful argument. In order to understand why certain ideas assume dominant character, why certain ideas are considered to be mostly accepted by the people, Marx argues that these ideas in themselves do not have existence rather these ideas become powerful ideas only when they are produced by the most powerful sections.

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"It is not consciousness that determines life,  
but life that determines consciousness"



I am ending today's class with this important quote; 'It is not the consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. It is a major critique of Hegelian philosophy but this is also central to Marxian scheme of things where he argues that it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. So, this life according to Marx has to be understood by analysing its economic aspects then you will see how the powerful groups engage in the process of production, produce certain ideas and these ideas of the powerful become the powerful ideas.

There is a clear connection between the dominant ideas and the dominant group and Marx calls out our draws attention to understand this particular relationship between the social dominance of certain class and the dominating ideas and he argues that there is a clear parallel between them. This is something so central to understand, how social status-quo

works and how social change can be brought in. That themes we will discuss in the coming classes so, I am winding up the session today and we will meet you in the next class. Thank you.