UNIT 8: MODE OF PRODUCTION

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- know the meaning and concept of mode of production,
- know about relations of production
- know about forces of production
- know about different types of mode of production

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The term Mode of Production was derived from the work of Karl Marx and it has a great importance in the Marxist theories. It simple parlance, it denotes the different ways that the individuals collectively produce the means of subsistence in order to survive and enhance social being.

The concept of Mode of Production was used by Karl Marx as a classificatory tool to describe and to differentiate various economic systems in historical terms. According to the Marxist understanding, Mode of Production can be understood as the unity of the productive forces and the relations of production. Society is a dynamic entity. Change and progress are very important and necessary features of a human society. In this unit,

we are going to understand how Marx interpreted the human relationship throughout the history by emphasizing on mode of production.

8.3 MODE OF PRODUCTION

8.3.1 Meaning and concept

We the human beings cannot think of living our lives without being in touch with other people or without being in a larger society. The foremost element of a human society is human relationships. To fulfil the necessities of lives people depend upon each other by various means. We cannot get our necessary products or objects from the nature to use directly. For this people go through different processes where these natural products are turned into some material commodities which we use for our various purposes. This system of material production has been playing a significant role in human society since ages and is also responsible for creating human relations. Mode of production denotes the ways human beings collectively produce the means of subsistence in order to survive and enhance social well being. That is why, for Marx, the successive modes of production are basic elements of a systematic description of history. The concept of mode of production occupies a central position in Marxist interpretation of social development.

According to Marx, material or economy is the infrastructure of human lives, from where the social relations in a society are structured. According to Marx, infrastructure controls or determines the superstructure. Here, superstructure refers to entities like religion, politics, government etc. Therefore, the material or the economy has always been the central of any production system. From Marx's view mode of production is how the humans produce material goods in a society during a particular period that determines the historical development of that society. Therefore, here in production, human social relations play an important role. Marx has discussed various stages of human history on the basis of different modes of production and these classifications are discussed in the later part of the unit.

While discussing the mode of production in contemporary society, we cannot step ahead without understanding the concept of 'surplus'. The surplus value and surplus labour is a very strong and inevitable contribution of Marx while discussing mode of production. The word surplus depicts the remaining amount after the need is satisfied or fulfilled. In capitalist mode of production, Marx talked about the capitalist bourgeoisie class and the proletariat labour class and their relationship in the production process. In this process the proletariat or the labour class has always been exploited by the capitalist class. The labour class is forced to engage in the production system after their definite working hours or after the necessity is fulfilled. The extra working hours and the extra production is the surplus amount and here no extra benefits are given to the workers for their extra labour. Rather the profit that is gained from the surplus production is enjoyed by the capitalist itself.

Mode of production must be comprehended in the context of it's two basic and foremost elements, and they are the forces of production and relations of production.

8.3.2 Forces of Production

Forces of production refers to the physical means and techniques of production to which labourers include value and transform capital into commodities for sale. According to Marx, forces of production are constituted with the help of two most important elements of production system which are means of production and human labour power. Means of production include the factories, machineries, raw materials and other physical objects and it needs knowledge and physical power for its utilization which come from human labour power. Simply, forces of production consists of different instruments of production and labour power.

As we know, change is an inevitable part of the society and we the human beings always seek changes to fulfil the needs. Such changes also affect the production system of a society. That is why, Marx discussed about different modes of production in different societies in different periods of time. Changes in the material production along with the natural and ecological phenomena determine the changes that take place in a particular mode of

production. In due course of time, there have been some changes taking place in the development of machineries, production process, knowledge and skill of workers and so on. Forces of production also include them in its sphere of productive forces. Many Marxist scholars also speak about the impact of geographical and ecological space as a part of productive forces. The changes towards the development of the forces of production have been reflecting the human struggle with nature in order to attain material goods. The changes in the productive forces help in transforming the natural resources to material goods and commodities which have very good value in exchange market system. According to Marx, forces of production are the driving factor in historical development and a new mode of production occurs when there is a conflict between the emerging productive forces and existing social relations.

8.3.3 Relations of production

People live in a society and depend upon one another. This dependency or the relation among human beings is also reflected on the ability to produce as a collective unit. In the material production system, forces of production are not the only factor that provides input but relations of production also play a significant role. These two elements are strongly interrelated with each other. Relations of production are the combined result of social relations and economic dependency. According to Marx, people enter into definite social relations with one another in order to produce and within these social relations the production takes place. In this process the social relations are determined by the level and character of the development of the productive forces.

In simple words, we can understand the relations of production as the sum total of social relationships that people must enter into, to survive, to produce and reproduce their means of life. In this process people enter to produce the necessities and amenities of life. The interesting feature of relations of production is that, both the classes of the society work together in the production system.

8.3.3 Different modes of production

Karl Marx in his work "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" in 1859 talked about four different types of modes of production that the human society has passed through. These are discussed below.

(A) Asiatic mode of production:

Asiatic mode of production is characterised by the primitive communities which were partly organised on the basis of kinship relations. This mode of production constitutes one of the possible forms of transition from classless to class based society. Asiatic mode of production was basically found in the primitive society where low division of labour existed. It is similar to tribal mode of production. The basic features of Asiatic mode of production are; the absence of state ownership and presence of communal ownership of land, simple agricultural and industrial society, artificial irrigation, based on geographical factors and climate, etc. The Asiatic mode of production was termed by Karl Marx as this mode of production was first identified in the traditional history of India, China, Persia, Indonesia and other Asian countries (Krader, 1980).

In Asiatic mode of production, one group extracts the social surplus from another group with the help of violence, and later stay with them by imposing their own ideology. The land is controlled by the conquerors or by the ruling group and the rest of the land is given to the oppressed group for production of food stuffs which is later owned by the ruling group. It is the most contentious among all the modes of production.

Marx was criticised by different scholars for his social analysis of Asiatic mode of production. According to them, Marx only emphasized on the western societies by leaving the oriental societies apart. Scholar Karl Wittfogel, in his work "Oriental Despotism" has given two basic arguments regarding Asiatic mode of production. According to him,

- The Asiatic society is an agricultural society which is based on irrigation. Therefore it can be called as hydraulic society. In this society the impact of geography is prominent.
- The Asiatic society is also based on despotism.

b) Ancient mode of production

With the end of Asiatic mode of production, the ancient mode of production came into being with the concept of slavery. The concept of private property emerged in this mode of production as a result of the development of a more complex division of labour. The division of labour had been evidenced in the field of settled agriculture, rise of animal husbandry, handicrafts etc.

The physically, politically and materially strong groups are the ruling class or the landowners who expropriate the agricultural surplus from the servile peasants or the slaves. The slaves had no right in using any property or commodity that they produced. They were bought and sold by the owners and this system gave rise to the family of slaves and family of owners or masters.

The slaves or the peasants are the most exploited class of the society in ancient mode of production. They sell their physical labour to their owners' profit. They were not given any opportunities to raise their voice against the exploitations that had been happening with them. This circumstance is defined by Marx as the class-in-itself.

c) Feudal mode of production

The feudal mode of production is the stage where the distinction between both the classes was very distinct. As Marx mentioned about the two classes such as bourgeoisie and proletariat, and their relationship in the material production can be related with the lords and serfs or tenants of the feudal mode of production. In this mode of production the lords own the land and they lease the land to the agricultural labourers. The owners who were leased had to pay certain taxes and the labourers were given wages. As in capitalist system the owners get surplus, same way in the feudal mode of production the lords or the owners appropriated land rent from the serfs.

In this mode of production the serf was bound to the soil which was ruled by the feudal lord (Krader, 1980). The serfs were unfree in both form and substance and were deprived of property rights though they used owners property for production. The serfs or the labours sold their labour for their owners to feed and fulfil the necessities of their family. The serfs were forced to fulfil the economic demands of an overlord. These demands were fulfilled by the serfs by performing their services. These services could also be in the form of dues to be paid by money or kind. These dues were levied on the family holdings of the peasants. In feudal mode of production the feudal rent whether in terms of services or taxes was very important component. The lords exploited the serfs by not paying them the wages and imposing heavy amount of taxes. But this feudal period did not sustain for long due to the development of factories, machineries and urbanization. Emergence of Capitalist mode of production replaced and transformed the feudal mode of production.

d) Capitalist mode of production

Capitalist mode of production defines the dominant character of capital in the production system. Here, the capital can be found in different forms such as; money or credit to purchase the labour power and the necessary materials for the production and also to buy the machineries. In this mode of production the capital is owned by a particular class and the production process, decisions related to production system or finance etc. are controlled by the capitalist class. The private ownership of capital exists in this mode of production and it is considered as the prime feature of capitalist mode of production.

Coming to the condition of the working class in capitalist production, their situation is much liberal and they are free compared to the previous modes of productions. The workers enter into a contract with the employers or the capitalist. The workers enter into the system of production where they sell their physical and mental labour to the capitalist class and earn money in terms of wages or salary. Money becomes the medium of exchange and as a result of this importance of financial co-operations like bank etc. started rising.

Capitalist mode of production began in the Europe and after the Industrial Revolution in England it took a rapid growth in the entire world by increasing the use of machineries and working class. According to Marx, the capitalist society or the capitalist mode of production is a part of the historical phases which is to be eventually replaced by socialism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 What is forces of production?

Q.2 What is relations of production?

Q.3 What are the different types of Modes of Production given by Karl Marx?



8.4 LET US SUM UP

- People cannot survive without any contact or relations with others and therefore Aristotle said Man is a Social Animal. People build relations with other people to fulfil the necessities of lives and this is how they are depended upon each other by various means.
- In simple words, Mode of production denotes the different ways that the individuals collectively produce the means of subsistence in order to survive and enhance social being
- The concept Mode of Production was coined by Karl Marx as classificatory tool to describe and to differentiate various economic systems in historical terms.
- According to Marx, material or economy is the infrastructure of human lives, from where the social relations in a society are structured.
- It is the infrastructure that controls or determines the superstructure which are; religion, government, polity etc.
- Forces of production and relations of production are the two basic elements of mode of production.

- Forces of production is constituted by means of production and human labour power.
- Relations of production denote the sum total of social relationships that people must enter into, to survive, to produce and reproduce their means of life.
- Marx discussed about four different types of modes of production in his work "A Contribution to the Critique to the Political Economy", that the human society has passed through.
- Asiatic mode of production is the primitive system of production. It had similar pattern of mode of production and low and simple division of labour. The lands were communally owned.
- Ancient mode of production brought the concept of slavery. Private ownership of the property emerged and the division of labour turned to a complex form. The peasants or the slaves were bought and sold by their owners treating them as commodities.
- Feudal mode of production started with the concept of lords and the serfs. In this mode of production the lords own the land and they lease the land to the agricultural labourers. The owners who were leased had to pay certain taxes and the labourers were given wages.
- Capitalist mode of production is found in our contemporary society. It is mostly prominent in the industrialised urban society where the division of labour is found in a complex form. In this system of production two classes of people are found, which are, the capitalist owners and the working class. The working class people sell their physical and mental labour to the capitalist class and receives wages or salary for that.



8.5 FURTHER READING

- Bottomore, Thomas B.(1975). Marxist Sociology. Macmillan: London
- Donaldson, M. (2012). "The riddle of history solved": socialist strategy, modes of production and social formations in Capital. The Journal of Australian Political Economy, (70), 130.
- Krader, L. (1980). The Asiatic Mode of Production. International Journal of Politics, 10(2/3), 99-128.
- Marx, K. (2010). A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. In Marx Today (pp. 91-94). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Forces of production can be defined as the physical means and the techniques of production to which labourers include value and transform capital into commodities for sale. According to Marx, forces of production is constituted with the help of two most important elements of production system which are means of production and human labour power.

Ans to Q2: Relations of production is the sum total of social relationships that people must enter into, to survive, to produce and reproduce their means of life. According to Marx, people enter into definite social relations with one another in order to produce and within these social relations the production takes place.

Ans to Q3: Marx discussed about four types of modes of production that the human society has passed through. These are such; Asiatic mode of production, Ancient mode of production, Feudal mode of production and Capitalist mode of production.



8.7 MODEL QUESTIONS:

A) **Short Questions** (Answer within 150 words)

Q1) What are the basic features of Asiatic mode of production?

Q2) What are the characteristics of Capitalist mode of production?

B) **Long Questions** (Answer within 300-500 words)

Q1) What do you understand by Mode of production? Discuss in your own words.

Q2) Discuss the various types of modes of production as describes by Karl Marx.

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