UNIT 9: MODE OF PRODUCTION IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the tribal mode of production
- know about the economic system of tribal societies, through the systems of producion and consumption
- know the other major modes of production.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

The term mode of production derives largely from the works of Karl Marx. Mode of production refers to the varied ways that human beings collectively produce the means of subsistence in order to survive and enhance social being. Marx believed that human history could be characterized by the dominant modes of production. In this sense the term refers to a specific economic system. In this unit, we shall try to understand the tribal mode of production.

9.3 MODE OF PRODUCTION

In the context of studies on mode of production, Karl Marx is credited fro two distinct contributions, amongst others: providing an analytical framework for defining specific modes of production and locating those

modes in terms of a theory of historical development. The Mode of Production is comprised of relations of production and forces of production. Production begins with the development of its determinative aspect - the productive forces - which, once they have reached a certain level, come into conflict with the relations of production within which they have been developing. This leads to an inevitable change in the relations of production, since in the obsolete form they cease to be indispensable condition of the production process. In its turn, the change in the relations of production, which means the substitution of the new economic basis for the old one, leads to less rapid change in the entire society. Therefore, the change in the Mode of Production comes about not through people's volition, but by virtue of the correspondence between the productive relations to the character and level of development of the productive forces. Due to this, the development of society takes the form of the natural historical change of socio-economic formations. Each mode of production had its own dynamic characters.

People need food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life in order to survive. They cannot get all these things ready-made from nature. To survive, they produce material goods from objects found in nature. Material production has always been and still is the basis of human existence. For Karl Marx, the history of human societies is the story of how people relate to one another in their efforts to make a living. He said, "The first historical act is…the production of material life. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history".

According to Marx, economic production or production of material life is the starting point from which society as an inter-related whole is structured. He speaks of reciprocity between economic factors and other aspects of historical development of mankind. The factor of economic production is all the same a key concept in explaining the changes that occur in society. He considers that forces of production along with relations of production form the basis of economic and social history of every society. In his Introduction to the Grundrisse, Marx says that although the three processes of production, distribution and consumption are not one and the

same, they represent a totality. It is so because after completion, each of the three processes creates the other process. In this way, one mediates the other. For example, production, once complete, becomes an object of consumption. Similarly, distribution and production are closely related processes. In this way, these economic categories carry definite relations between them. For Marx, a certain type of production creates a certain type of distribution, exchange and consumption. On the basis of all these economic categories, are formed certain types of relations of production. Marx argues that production itself is based on other economic categories and clear-cut relation between production and other economic processes. What is evident is that material production is basic to human societies. For Marx, production is at once both a general and a historical category.

The forces of production express the degree to which human beings control nature. The more advanced the productive forces are, greater is their control over the nature and vice versa. The forces of production, according to Marx, include means of production and labor power.

In every social order there is a continuous change in the material forces of production. Sometimes, as in tribal societies, this change is produced by some natural and ecological phenomena, such as the drying up of rivers, deforestation in or exhaustion of the soil etc. Usually, however, this change is produced by a development in the instruments of production. Human beings have always attempted to better their lives and overcome scarcity. The development of forces of production reflects the constant struggle of human beings to master nature through their labor.

The development of the forces of production is primary because it results from a factor, which is, in a sense, exogenous. The motive force lies outside the forces and relations of production and acts first upon the former. The motive force is the rational and ever-present impulse of human beings to try to better their situation and overcome scarcity by developing the productive forces. Human beings are, above all, like animals, producing society by acting upon nature through their labor. Productive forces transform nature into use values and exchange values. The productive forces compel

the creation and destruction of successive systems of production relations between human beings.

Productive forces have an intrinsic tendency to develop, as human beings' knowledge and mastery over nature increase. As these forces develop, successive social relations of production develop and consequently give way. At a particular point of development the productive forces and the production relations enter into conflict: the latter being unstable to contain the former. Society then enters a period of revolution. People become conscious of this by recognizing the existence of class struggle, between those whose activity fits them for the new economic structure, and those who are guardians of the old. Different socio-economic organizations of production, which have characterized human history, arise or fall as they enable or impede the expansion of society's productive capacity. The growth of the productive forces thus explains the general course of human history. The productive forces, however, include, as we have already noted, not just the means of production (tools, machines, factories and so on), but labor power, the skills, knowledge, experience, and other human faculties used in work. The productive forces represent the powers society has at its command in material production.

The forces of production are not the only factors in material production. People are able to produce jointly by organizing in a society. In this sense, labor is and always has been social in character. According to Marx, in order to produce, people enter into definite relations with one another. Only within these social relations does production take place. It can be said that the relations of production are the social relations found among the people involved in the process of production. These social relations are determined by the level and character of the development of productive forces.

'Forces' and 'relations' of production are strongly interrelated. The development of one leads to a growing incompatibility or contradiction with the other. In fact, the contradictions between the two aspects of production 'act as the motor of history'. The chain of causation in historical development runs in this manner.

The relations of production, which are said to correspond to society's productive level, link the productive forces and human beings in the process of production. These relations are of two broad types. The first refers to those technical relations that are necessary for the actual production process of products. The second refers to the relations of economic control, which are legally manifested as property ownership. They govern access to the forces of production and products.

Relations of production are the social relations of production. As such they include both the relations between the direct producers or workers and their employers or those who control their labor, and the relations between the direct producers themselves. Relation of production is not merely the ownership of means of production.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. From where did the concept 'mode of production' derive ?

9.4 TRIBE DEFINITION, MODE OF PRODUCTION

In Marx's writing, stages of social history are differentiated not by what human beings produce but by how, or by what means, they produce the material goods for subsistence. The patterns of tribal society are related to a dependency upon horticultural system cultivation, marked by different forms of crop production with high land, but low labor and capital inputs. The productive forces of society reflect the degree to which human beings control nature. The more advanced the productive forces, the greater is their control over nature. In order to produce, people enter into definite relations with one another.

Tribe is concomitantly a contentious term vis-à-vis issue. It is rather difficult to develop, define and conceptualize tribe in totality. Social anthropologists and sociologists from beginning striving to study tribes but surprisingly most of them came across with enormous problems to

adequately define the term tribe. Definition or conceptualization of tribe always becomes difficult for sociologists and anthropologists not only for variety of socio- economic milieu but also for their continuous assimilation and acculturation with wider social structure. Tribal mode of production can also be classified as primitive mode of production.

Anthropologists and sociologists definition of tribe is rooted in evolutionary framework. Evolutionist L.H. Morgan and functionalist Emile Durkheim's study of primitive society exemplify that society is not static rather gradually evolves with time space equation. To them, the term tribe not only connotes a type of society but a stage of evolution and development. While Morgan viewed that every stage of social evolution is characterized by a specific mode of social organization, Durkheim used the term poly-segmental society instead of using or accepting the term tribe. In his book 'The Division of Labour in Society' (1839) he highlights two types of solidarity in society and social organization of primitive tribe is characterized by mechanical solidarity.

L.H. Morgan in his book 'Ancient Society' (1877) defines tribe as a completely organized society where all forms of social relation are dominated by kinship relation. For Morgan, tribal society is completely organized in such a way that their form of social organization is capable of reproducing itself. A tribe, according to him, is a collection of number of clans who have distinct nomenclature, separate language, distinct political organization and a territory under their own possession.

Primitive/ Tribal communism is the earliest mode of production in Marxist thought. Karl Marx proposed that Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and bourgeois modes of production are epochs that mark the transitions of societies. Also, the changes in the mode of production from primitive communism through slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism to communism are due to the method of dialectic, and the theory of materialism. The dialectic method involves the meeting of extreme forces that merge into synthesis. At the early state of primitive communism, primitive forms of hunting gave way to primitive forms of agriculture and cattle rearing. Also,

dialectic changes of the matriarchate to the patriarchate types were recognized. In the matriarchate form, women played a dominant role in production under primitive agriculture, while the men roamed the forest after game. In the patriarchate form, men played the dominant role in the hunting and cattle-rearing stages because they were efficient with a bow, arrows, spears, and lasso. The actual process of analyzing the changes of modes of production follows a materialistic theory. Through evolution, human beings developed a consciousness that became sensitized to material change. In primitive societies, production was in the simple form of adapting to nature. Land was cultivated before it was divided, and the consciousness was communal. As production processes changed, envisaging private ownership, people's consciousness changed in that direction.

During primitive communism property belonged to the community and labor owned all the product of its labor in the absence of capital- and land-owning classes. If one tribe was conquered by another, the conquered tribe became property less, as was the case with slavery and serfdom. A tribe and its property formed a sort of unity that originated from the mode of production where individuals related to one another and to nature. The object of production was to reproduce the producer. For Marx, production is not possible without capital. In primitive communism capital could be just the hands of a hunter-gatherer. Strictly speaking, capital is specific to the bourgeois mode of production. Tools are not capital outside of capitalism. And production is not possible without human labor, not tools, which are a product of human labor and natural resources.

Marx wrote, "In early communal societies in which primitive communism prevailed, and even in the ancient communal town, it was this communal society itself with its conditions which appeared as the basis of production, and its reproduction appeared as its ultimate purpose" (Marx 1967b, p. 831). Primitive/ Tribal communism dissolved when the mode of production changed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q2. According to Karl Marx in the Marxist theory of historical materialism, a mode of production is a specific combination of?

Q3. What is the earliest form of mode of production?



9. 5 LET US SUM UP

- The concepts of forces, relations and mode of production are central to Marxist social theory. The mode of production, which for Marx is the main determinant of social phenomena, is made up of the forces of production and relations of production.
- The forces of production refer to both the material worked on and the tools and techniques employed in production of economic goods.
- The relationships of production refer to the social relations arising in the process of production, especially between the owners and non-owners of the means of production. Relations of production include the control and the capacity to possess the products.
- Thus in capitalist societies, for example, the relations of production are those relations that obtain between capitalist and worker such that the former (relations of production) both controls the means of production and can dispose of the goods and services that are produced by the worker.
- The forces and relations of production are fundamental to the constitution of any society. The different ways in which different societies are organized depend upon the relationship of the forces of production to the relations of production.
- The concept of the social relationships of production does not so much refer to the relationship between individuals as between social classes. Because the relationships of production are essentially

antagonistic (for example, the capitalist appropriates the product of labor of the worker), so are the relations between the classes.

- A mode of production is the relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production. Modes of production can be distinguished from one another by the different relationships between the forces and relations of production.
- Primate / tribal communes is the earliest mode of production is Marxist thought. A tribe and its property formed a sort of unit that original from the mode of production where individuals related to one an other and to nature.



9.6 FURTHER READING

- Bottomore, Thomas B., 1975. Marxist Sociology. Macmillan: London
- Emile Durkheim. 1997. "The Division of Labour in Society?. New York: The Free Press, pp. 1-31.
- Lewis H. Morgan. 1877. 'Ancient Society'. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, pp. 1- 368.

9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: The term mode of production derives from the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883), and the concept has played a significant role in subsequent Marxist theory.

Ans to Q2: Productive forces: these include human labor power and means of production (e.g. tools, productive machinery, commercial and industrial buildings, other infrastructure, technical knowledge, materials, plants, animals and exploitable land).

Ans to Q3 :Tribal/ Primitive mode of production



9.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

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

Q1) What are the different modes of production?

Q2) Explain the tribal mode of production.

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

Q1) How is Asiatic mode of production different from the tribal/Neolithic mode of production?

Q2) What are the features of tribal mode of production?

Q3) What are the criticisms to tribal mode of production?

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