

Classical Sociology Theory
Professor. R. Santosh
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture No. 43
Weber on Democracy and Colonialism

Welcome to the class, let us discuss Weber's position on democracy and colonialism. Because as you must be remembering, we have been discussing these two topics in detail, especially colonialism and democracy at least with respect to Karl Marx and Emil Durkheim in detail, because these two are extremely important theoretical concerns for all of us even today, in the, even the contemporary world.

It is extremely important for us to understand, how these founding fathers of sociology, understood these two core themes of democracy and colonialism and especially colonialism assumes a significant, you know, position because all these scholars, whom we are discussing, they really lived during the height of colonialism, and they were the beneficiaries of colonialism, and they lived in a place that had colonized the rest of the world.

It is extremely important for us to understand how did these people, how did these stalwart, look at the process of, say of colonization, and whether they were critical of that or whether they took it for granted, were they sympathetic to that or they did not really look at it, to critically see all these points are extremely important. So, let us begin with the Weberian understanding or Weberian position on democracy.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:42)

- Weber as a theorist of democracy



- For Weber, the nation-state is tied to bureaucratic domination and control. The state is based on the legitimate use of force over a delimited territory, for governments are ultimately founded on the control and use of violence. All politicians must be willing to use state-sanctioned violence in order to responsibly carry out their duties.

- Democracy and bureaucracy are inseparable, as democratic political representation and equality demand administrative and judicial provisions to prevent privilege.



We can say that, Weber is a theorist of democracy, of course, he looked into a number of other aspects, but he had quite a lot of substantive things, to talk about democracy, he was not like say, Karl Marx, who was extremely skeptical of a political democracy without the emergence of a social democracy. Weber has a lot of interesting things to say about democracy.

For Weber, the nation state is tied to bureaucratic domination and control, this is something that we already discuss, for Weber, bureaucratization is nothing but it is a rationalization of the modern times, and then Weber is very emphatic in arguing that you cannot have a modern society without rationalization. When you understand the processes that are taking place across various spheres of modern society, whether it is a state or political system or church or education system or every important sphere, we will see that this bureaucratization has taken place. Weber argues that it is an unavoidable process.

Weber very emphatically argues that this process of bureaucratization is very closely connected with the emergence and functioning of nation state. For Weber, the nation state is tied to the bureaucratic domination and control. The state uses a bureaucratic apparatus for domination and control. This is extremely important, because we are coming to some very important definition of Max Weber on nation state. He identifies or he characterizes nation state, as the state is based on the legitimate use of force over a delimited territory, for governments are ultimately founded on the control and use of violence and this is an extremely important one.

Usually we understand, nation state as the powerful entity, which has a sovereignty over a given territory that is how we understand the sovereignty of a nation state, when you say that a particular nation state for example, India is a sovereign republic, and it means that India has absolute authority over its territory. We know that this claim is not many times accepted by others and there could be a quite lot of contestations regarding what, where exactly is the boundary.

But generally, we understand that a nation state has complete authority, complete sovereignty over its territory. But more interestingly, more importantly, Weber argues that, nation state has the ability to use legitimate use of force over a delimited territory, for governments are ultimately founded on the control and use of violence. State alone has the ability to use legitimate form of violence. That is why every state has specialized agencies for unleashing violence, we can think about it as all kinds of armed forces, including police to that of military, all specialized commander forces, all these are groups who are trained to kill or trained to inflict violence on somebody.

Inflicting violence on whom is a very interesting question. Military is trained to unleash violence on the external enemy, whereas the police is trained to unleash violence or, or use violence on its own subjects, on its own citizens. By the very definition that a particular political system is, as you know is a nation state, it means that it has the ability to unleash violence. We know that nation state alone has the right to legitimately take out somebody's life.

That is why capital punishment, if you know, is a legitimate thing. Even suicides in many countries, is punishable or attempt to suicide is punishable and you do not have the right to take away your own life, you are not the owner of your own life, you cannot take away your life, the state is the owner of that. So, that is why, the capital punishment, killing somebody by hanging or shooting is accepted as a legitimate form of providing punishment in many societies.

All politicians must be willing to use state sanctioned violence in order to responsibly carry out their duties. Weber is very clear that the responsibility of nation state, is basically to control and use of violence over its delimited, in its delimited territory over the subjects, over its own people, and without that initial state cannot exist. So, democracy and bureaucracy are inseparable, as

democratic political representation and equality demand administrative and judicial provisions to prevent privilege.

Democracy and bureaucracy are inseparable, as democratic political representations and equality, demand administrative and judicial provisions to prevent privilege. So, it is an extremely again, an ideal, typical argument that in a modern democratic system, you need to have the democracy and bureaucracy in its complete ethical sense. Because he says that, in order to prevent privilege, because in every society, there would be sections of people who are traditionally privileged, and this privilege can come from various sources. I hope you discuss, our discussion about Weber and Marx, in fact, a kind of a debate between Weber and Marx about, what are the sources of stratification. So, please keep those discussions in mind when we come about.

In order to prevent privilege and to ensure that a traditionally powerful or a newly powerful group does not, you know give any regards to existing other forms of authority does not really bring in personal elements, it does not bring in traditional elements, it is supposed to be extremely, it is supposed to be solely focused on the rational things. So, that is why, Weber argues that a very impersonal, extremely powerful, impartial, impersonal, bureaucratic system is very much important for a vibrant democratic, democracy to thrive.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:32)

- Weber views modern politics as invariably tied to rationalization. In democracies the bureaucratization of political parties is the rule.
- Often politicians offer patronage to their supporters, which encourages a party machinery. Parties demand a party organization to attain and maintain power. Weber views politics as giving leaders a feeling of power over others and of influencing historically significant events, and he develops a characteristically cynical view of political life.
- For Weber, a good politician passionately believes in her cause. Yet a good politician must balance this passion with a strong sense of responsibility and an understanding of proportion.



Weber views modern politics as invariably tied to rationalization, in democracies the bureaucratization of political parties is the rule. Now, he has a very interesting analysis about political parties and he argues that there is a bureaucratization across bureaucratization of the political parties as well. Often politicians offer patronage to their supporters which encourage a party machinery. Parties demand a party organization, to attain and maintain power. Weber views politics as giving leaders a feeling of power over others, and of influencing historically significant events, and he develops a characteristically cynical view of the political life.

Weber has very extensive analysis about the political parties and we also know that, how political parties are supposed to function, whether parties with say, a very strong ideological core or parties with a very strong say, appeal to certain say, primordial affinities, especially in India, you know, that certain parties appeal on the basis of religious affiliation, certain parties appeal on the basis of linguistic affiliation, certain other parties appeal on the basis of caste affiliation, certain other parties appeal on abstract ideas like equality or other ideas or socialism or more other ideas.

But whatever be the ideas, politicians offer patronage to their supporters. And that is how this everyday democracy works. Everyday democracy works because, the politicians are supposed to do offer patronage to the supporters, which encourage a party machinery. The parties demand a party organization to attain and maintain power. We know the kind of very interesting dynamics

between the ruling party and the government itself. The Prime Minister or the Chief Minister of every country will also be a face of the party. His or her government is, in fact supposed to reflect the, the policies of her party.

There is a very thin line that separates the party and the government, once the party leader assumes, he or she takes the oath and assumes the office of a Prime Minister or Chief Minister, he or she is supposed to be completely devoid, completely devoid from the party agenda, and supposed to look at everybody equally, without favor and fear that is the important, you know, a word or important sentence in the oath. But in general or in our everyday practices, we understand that most of these people who assume power, will be also partial to their own political parties, they will be committed to implement the ideologies of their parties.

Weber views politics as giving leaders a feeling of power over others, and of influencing historically significant events. He develops a characteristically cynical view of political life. Because why a cynical view thinks that a completely typical bureaucratize, the process is not happening in the current democracy, because a host of other considerations including favoritism, you know, certain, tradition, giving privilege to certain groups, all these things seep in.

For Weber, a good politician passionately believes in her cause, yet a good politician must balance this passion with a strong sense of responsibility, and an understanding of proportion. This is what I was talking about, they have to have a kind of a passionate belief in her cause, and this cause is mostly, defined or influenced by a very strong ideological possession. This has to, so this, will put enormous, pressure on the leader to strike a balance between the commitment to this particular cause, and a host of other, people, other causes, maybe contradictory causes, or other people who may not be a part of this cause. It is very important that the leader develops sensitivity to understand these situations.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:51)

- An irresponsible politician appeals to voters' emotions and often becomes vain in her search for power. She lacks objectivity, becoming more concerned with the impressions and effects of her actions than with causes.
- Though he believes that democracies tend to promote demagogues, he views parliament as a way to control the political leader's power by establishing legal safeguards and determining peaceful means of political succession. Parliament is a training ground for leaders, who learn the politics of compromise and responsibility.
- He states that democracy and freedom "are in fact only possible if they are supported by the permanent, determined will of a nation not to be governed like a flock of sheep." A strong democratic nation is based on informed popular sovereignty.



An irresponsible politician appeals to voters emotions, and often become vain in her search for power. It is, she lacks objectivity, becoming more concerned with the impressions and effects of her actions than with causes. A very important argument on irresponsible politician and we have a lot of such figures in history. Even now, there are a lot of interesting discussions and debates, talking about the emergence of populist leaders, a new trend maybe for the last 10 or 15 years across the globe.

A new crop of populist leaders are supposedly emerging across the globe, including U.S. and Brazil and you know, Turkey and, and a host of other places where, they are seen as appealing to the voters emotions, rather than upholding more lofty ideals and other things. She lacks objectivity and such leaders who can ignite very strong passions of the people, because we know that, igniting passion is something important, but also can be counterproductive as you are igniting the passion of the people.

Most of the time, these passions will be always, you know, directed against another and if the passions are built around questions of identity, identities are always built against the other. Without another, you do not have an identity. If you think that a particular nation is for a particular group of people, and if you want to communicate that with the people, or if you want to make use of or encash, if you want to make use of or exploit, that kind of sentiment which is already dormant among the people, then what you are doing, you are igniting the kind of passion

of the people and that can lead to quite a lot of violence. It can lead to quite a lot of turmoil and other things.

She lacks objectivity, becoming more concerned with the impressions that, effects often actions rather than with the causes, though he believes that democracies tend to promote demagogues, he views parliament as a way to control the political leaders power by establishing legal safeguards and determining peaceful means of political success. Here, he reposes enormous faith on the ability of parliament because we know that parliament is a conglomeration of so many different people representing different constituencies.

The constituency, I am not talking about the mere physical constituencies, or geographical constituencies, these people and parliamentarians, they represent different sections of people, they represent different, you know, group of people with diverse experiences, diverse historical background, diverse agendas, diverse, you know, opinion. So, this parliament is supposedly, is supposed to be a place where these people coming from so many different backgrounds engage in discussions and debates and then reach a kind of consensus. This consensus is what is supposed to emerge as a law from a particular parliament.

Weber had enormous faith on the ability of the parliament to, to reflect these diversities of society, and also the ability to checkmate a leader, a demagogue who wants to overrule everything and means of political. Parliament is a training ground for leaders, who learn the politics of compromise and responsibility. But again, we know that a host of contemporary examples, paint a rather different picture. We have a lot of examples of how leaders really make parliament really ineffective, leaders can simply overrule the parliament, especially if they have huge majority.

There are arguments that in many countries which were once respected for the vibrancy of their democracy have been made hollow from inside, you have all the structures of democracy, look, impact, but it has been hollowed out, it has been jeopardized from within, the very spirit of democracy has been very seriously undermined from within by these political parties and leaders. So, we have to say that the, the excessive optimism that Weber places on, parliament could be problematic.

Then he states that the democracy and freedom are in fact, only possible if they are supported by the permanent, determined will, of a nation not to be governed like a flock of sheep, a strong democratic nation is based on informed popular sovereignty, a very important point, that democracy and freedom are in fact only possible if they are supported by the permanent, determined will of a nation.

The will of a nation; what does the nation want? And who knows that? Who really represents the nation? Who really represent the people? Do our representatives, the elected representatives actually represent the people? Or do they represent some more vested interest? These are some of the very profound questions, starting from Aristotle, a host of people, and being again, Karl Marx asked some of the very pertinent questions.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:33)

- People must become capable of making good, rational, informed decisions if any form of popular sovereignty is to succeed. Weber ties the capacity to act in a politically mature manner to ethics, for he sees the importance of leaders, as well as citizens, developing qualities of judgment and the capacity to appraise historical events and political problems.
- The major achievements of democracy, Such as constitutions and a belief in human rights, depend on cultivating a common capacity to rule. Their political and social institutions must teach a democratic people how to exercise "sober judgment."
- For Weber, social sciences such as economics or sociology should be "concerned above all else with the quality of the human beings reared under those economic and social conditions of existence"



So, Weber argues that people must become capable of making good rational, informed decisions, if any form of popular sovereignty is to succeed, so he would argue that, democracy will thrive or democracy, in its actual sense of the meaning will survive, will exist only if the people are able to act rational choices. But again, we know that it is not an easy task. The candidates who are fielded by political parties, there are a host of reports and news reports and studies, which talk about a very shady background of many of our own candidates or the people who stand in elections in India. People who have been charge sheeted, people have been accused of criminal cases, or for, or for all kind of violence and others.

There is a huge disparity between, what is expected of a democracy and what really happens. Weber ties the capacity to act in a political mature manner to ethics, for he sees the importance of leaders as well as citizens developing qualities of judgment and capacity to appraise historical events and political problems. So, he centers on this whole issue of ethics and believing that human beings, ordinary citizens and their representatives will be able to make use of the ethics so that the whims and fancies of a particular leader will not come into play.

The major achievement of democracy, such as constitution and a belief in human rights depend on cultivating a common capacity to rule, their political and social institutions must teach a democratic people how to exercise sober judgment. Weber was a very important advocate of liberalism, he was an important advocate of rights of the people, individualism. So, he argued very vehemently that you need to have a set of ideas and ethics that are oriented towards these liberal ideas, ideas to have a constitution and belief in human rights, depend on cultivating a common capacity to rule their political and social institutions must teach a democratic people, how to exercise “sober judgment”.

Now to get, in not how to give in for passion, not how to give in for popular sentiment, but to uphold some of the important ideals and important values and then govern accordingly. For Weber, social sciences, such as economics or sociology should be concerned above all else with the quality of the human being, reared under those economic and social conditions of existence. I personally found it as a very fascinating argument, he says that social sciences especially must be concerned above all else with the quality of human beings reared under those economic and social conditions of existence.

For Weber, the prime subject matter of these two disciplines at least, is to be constantly vigilant about the quality of human beings who are reared in those particular contexts. Weber is, as far as I understand, is completely against a utilitarian use or utilitarian understanding of this discipline. He believes that these disciplines, or by teaching these disciplines, or by learning this discipline, you are simply imparting certain skills, so that the person can be employed and then he can get, he or she can get away with their life.

No, he is not talking about that, he is talking about teaching these subjects or the ability of the subjects is to develop very important critical facilities, to encourage critical thinking, always be

sensitive, always be critical of the current situation, and on the basis of certain ethical positions, on the basis certain theoretical positions. This ability to have a critical engagement, with an ethical position is what Weber expects from these two important disciplines.

It is something very important that we need to keep in mind, especially in this kind of very difficult situations, where social sciences are always looked down upon or social sciences are seen as unwanted or unnecessary, people like Weber or, or almost any, you know, philosophers worth the salt will always say that, these disciplines are extremely important for a critical, consciousness for a, for the emergence of a population, who is quite sensitive to their own living situations.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:42)

- Weber on colonialism**
- Weber was sometimes guilty of an "Orientalist" perspective, as he sometimes evaluated non-Western societies in terms of the Western model.
 - Weber sometimes collapses irrationality and non-modern people into one category. He has a strong sense of the ways that irrationality could influence seemingly rational processes, as in his studies of religious asceticism and the importance of guilt in religious belief systems.



Next theme, let us see how Weber, looked at colonialism, what was his position on colonialism, because Weber lived, you know, through the peaks of colonialism. He was a German and Germany was a colonial country. Unlike Karl Marx, who wrote significantly about colonial societies, Weber had access to far better type of material, better resources to evaluate colonialism. Weber was sometimes guilty of an orientalist perspective, as he sometimes evaluated non Western societies in terms of the Western model.

I hope you are familiar with this term, orientalism or orientalist position, a term that was used to indicate the study of the East, the occident was considered to be the West. The entire forms of knowledge, the study of history, study of philosophy, study of philology, study of language,

study of ethics, study of archaeology, the whole body of knowledge that was developed in the West, which studied the East is understood by Eastern Orientalism or study of the East, it is a very broad category which included sinology, which included Indology. Indology is the study of India.

The huge body of knowledge that was created in the West but about the study of the East was the conventional understanding of this term, Orientalism. But this particular term was given a very interesting twist or interesting makeover by this very important scholar Edward Said, through his book called as Orientalism, in which he explains why this knowledge production is a construct by the rest in order to get a kind of a specific image for himself. He very beautifully very and elegantly explains the kind of connection between knowledge and power.

No knowledge is innocent, no knowledge is neutral, that there is a very strong connection between and interplay between power and knowledge. He argues that the Westerners were in a position to create such a knowledge because of colonialism and other things. Most of the knowledge that was created by the West, about the East was also the creation of a particular kind of a power equation. These scholars would argue that Weber also was one among them, Weber also was guilty of an orientalist bias, as he sometimes evaluated non- Western societies in terms of Western model.

For all these people, West is the place of modernity, it is a place of progress, it is a place of secularism, it is a place of empowerment, it is a place of rationality, and the rest of the West, the rest of the world is a place which has as all the negative meanings of all these qualities, that we mentioned, the rest of the world, especially the Orient, it is religious, it is not secular, it is primitive, it is superstitious, it is ignorant, it is irrational. You see a set of binaries, on the one hand, a host of binaries, are used to indicate the West. And on the other hand, its opposites are used to indicate the East and Weber also fell into the same trend because that was the time, that was a time when, looking at the world, through these eyes was seen as the most normal and ordinary thing to do.

Weber sometimes collapsed irrationality and non modern people into one category. There is no wonder, we always, we made that reference many times for him, this Western rationality, that kind of a peculiar rationality, he said, just, it is so peculiar, that it emerged only in the West, only

during this particular time, and it did not emerge anywhere else in the world, it did not emerge even in Europe before the emergence of modernity which is an extremely problematic claim.

He has a strong sense of the ways that, irrationality could influence seemingly rational process, as in his studies of religious asceticism, and the importance of guilt in religious belief system. He also mentioned I hope, you remember when, when he talks about Islam and he talks about Hinduism, when he talks about Confucianism, he elaborates why that none of these religions actually gave birth to a spirit of capitalist.

His argument is very clear, because these societies were always otherworldly. They were preoccupied with the question of the other world, they were you know, always seeped into a lot of our unfounded irrational superstitious beliefs, like say karma, dharma, fate and a host of other things, he did not have the drive to look into the present world and to actively change it. He said that only Judaism and especially in, in reformist Christianity, that it had that particular kind of a spark.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:13)

- The very first sentence of Protestant Ethics reads:

- *A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value.*

- The East lacks the history, beliefs, and the like which allowed Western capitalism to flourish. Despite Weber's critical comments about rationalization, he largely understands non-Western cultures through its categories. They have little capacity for agency.



The very first sentence of Protestant Ethics reads a product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances that the fact should be attributed, that in Western civilization and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomenon, have appeared, which as we like to think, lie in a line of development having universal significance and values.

This is very first sentence in Protestant Ethics. He is asking, and why that in Western civilization and why Western civilization only, the kind of cultural phenomenon have appeared, lie in a line of development having universal significance and value? So, why that only West was able to generate, come up with cultural phenomena and values of universal significance. Why that, they were able to come up with these kind of ideas of rationality, human rights, and a host of other things, why that the rest of the world did not do that?

It is a very important question that Weber asked just like any other, you know, Eurocentric European scholars must have asked during that particular time, that Marx shares the similar idea. Marx thinks that the non-westerners cannot write history, that history must be written. The similar idea is shared by Weber as well. This kind of thinking that really dominated the academic sphere for several decades is now being very actively questioned through a series of studies, which usually come under the category of de-colonial and postcolonial studies.

De-colonial studies, where we try to understand how these claims have really given birth to certain conceptual as well as theoretical categories, which really give you a very distorted picture about society. Just think about it even Weber does not have anything to talk about the influence of colonial exploitation. He does not say anything much about why that this whole colonial enterprise has really pauperized. It has really decimated a vast number of societies across the world, including Latin America, including Africa, including Asia, the devastating effects of colonization, is never addressed or never even acknowledged by most of these people.

They think that there was some essentially cultural elements emerge in Europe, because of some reasons and the rest of the world did not produce that very problematic, extremely problematic a position which again, did not allow them to look at this process of colonial imperialism, the slave trade, the kind of exploit, economic exploitation in an objective manner. He says, the East lacks history, beliefs, and the likes which allow Western capitalism to flourish. Despite Weber's critical comments about rationalization, he largely understands non-western cultures through its categories and they have little capacity for agency.

Weber talks about rationality. He also says that there are other kinds of rationality, but when it comes to his evaluation, he uses only the kind of rationality that he is familiar with the Western

rationality and on the basis of that, he evaluates and, and scales up other civilizations and even pronounces a kind of a judgment.

(Refer Slide Time: 33:01)

- While Weber ties religious traditions to political and economic factors, he does not discuss colonialism in any depth.
- Indeed, Weber supported an expansionist, imperialistic German state throughout his life.
- Rather than positing rationalization as some inevitable universal process sometimes Weber seems to argue that rationalization has no singular logic, that it is bound up with particular groups, social forces, and social relations that are local and historically specific. Thus, rationalization means different things in different cultures; and it may be able to be reversed or stopped in some instances.



While Weber ties religious traditions to political and economic factors, he does not discuss colonialism in any depth, as I mentioned. He has studied all these Eastern religions in detail Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, but he hardly discusses colonialism as a very important functional process. Indeed, Weber supported an expansionist imperialist German state throughout his life. We know that, what does it mean to be expansionist, what does it mean to be imperialist.

Imperialism, either it could be through direct dominance, or through dominance through trade, or through political patronage. But it is always about dominance. It is always about having scant interest about the people who are below you. It is an assumption that you have the inherent right to rule over somebody. Weber did not have any issue with that rather than positioning rationalization as some inevitable universal process sometimes, Weber seems to argue that rationalization has no singular logic, that it is bound up with a particular groups, social forces and social relations that are local and historically specific.

Sometimes he brings in more nuances in his argument about rationalization, thus rationalization means different thing to different cultures, and it may be able to be reversed or stopped in some instances. Rationalization means different things in different cultures, and it may be able to be

reversed or stopped in some instances. He brings in some certain nuances about rationalization, he thinks that it, it can appear in different forms in different society, but he is not free from that overall, you know, Eurocentric position.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:56)



- Weber shows that Western capitalism and its associated religious traditions are one form of civilization among many others.
- Further, Weber sees Western rationality as infused with irrational and destructive elements, culminating in a bureaucratized world without meaning.

⌂



Weber shows that Western capitalism and its associated religious traditions are one form of civilization, among many others. Further, Weber sees Western rationality as infused with irrational and destructive elements, culminating in a bureaucratized world without meaning. He developed this argument especially when he develops the kind of critical position of bureaucracy that it can be dehumanizing, it can be insensitive, it can be corrupt, and it can lead to nepotism, a host of others.

But generally, he understands this rationalism, as a unique product of European historical context and which he very clearly says that, it is absent in the rest of the societies. This is our brief discussion on Weber's possession on democracy and colonialism. I hope that you will find these discussions important and interesting, because it provides us with some opportunity to understand how a person like Weber, with so much of high stature really looked at these very key themes.

So, let us stop here and we will conclude this session, this discussion on Weber with the next class, where we have a critical analysis of Weber's contributions. So, thank you.

