

**A Critique of Emile Durkheim's Concept of Division of Labour***Pragya Mishra**Student BALLB, Semester VIII, Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur***Abstract**

Division of labour includes separation of the work force into different categories of labour; dividing the work required to produce a product into a number of different tasks that are performed by different workers. Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist who along with with Karl Marx and Max Weber, is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science and father of sociology<sup>1</sup>, has discussed the concept of division of labour in his book *De la division du travail sociale*, published in 1893<sup>2</sup>. This doctoral thesis of Durkheim provides us with an analysis of nature and causes of division of labour. It is indeed a classical study of social solidarity. This paper seeks to define the concept of Division of Labour and its different aspects; to explore the concept of Division of Labour according to Emile Durkheim and to explore the typology and history of Division of Labour.

**DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF DIVISION OF LABOUR AND ITS DIFFERENT ASPECTS**

*"...Social harmony comes essentially from the division of labour. It is characterized by a cooperation which is automatically produced through the pursuit by*

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<sup>1</sup> Craig J. Calhoun (2002). *Classical sociological theory*. Wiley-Blackwell. p. 107. ISBN 978-0-631-21348-2. Retrieved 19 June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Gianfranco Poggi (2000). *Durkheim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 3.

*each individual of his own interests. It suffices that each individual consecrate himself to a special function in order, by the force of events, to make himself solidary with others."*  
(Durkheim, 1933:200)

The division of labour is simply the separation and specialization of work among people. \ Division of labour includes separation of the work force into different categories of labour; dividing the work required to produce a product into a number of different tasks that are performed by different workers.

According to Weber's design, inherent within the specialization and division of labour is knowledge of the precise limit of each worker's "*sphere of competence*," and the authority to perform individual tasks without overlapping others<sup>3</sup>. The division of labour is the outcome of man's conscious reaction to the multiplicity of natural conditions.

### **EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT OF DIVISION OF LABOUR ACCORDING TO EMILE DURKHEIM**

Emile Durkheim has discussed the concept of division of labour in his book *De la division du travail sociale*, published in 1893<sup>4</sup>. This doctoral thesis of Durkheim provides us with an analysis of nature and causes of division of labour. It is indeed a classical study of social solidarity.

Émile Durkheim wrote about a fractionated, unequal world by dividing it along the lines of "*human solidarity*," whose essential moral value, Durkheim argued, depends on the extent of division of labour.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Morrison, Ken (2006): *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: formations of modern social thought*. Second edition. SAGE, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> Durkheim, E. (1982, first published 1893), *The Division of Labour in Society*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division\\_of\\_labour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_of_labour)

Émile Durkheim first used the phrase division of labour in a sociological sense in his discussion of social evolution. Rather than viewing division of labour as a consequence of a desire for material abundance, Durkheim stated that specialization arose from changes in social structure caused by an assumed natural increase in the size and density of population and a corresponding increase in competition for survival. Division of labour functioned to keep societies from breaking apart under these conditions.

In this work Durkheim has tried to determine the social consequences of the division of labour in different societies. The major theme of Durkheim's writings is the importance of shared social norms and values in maintaining social cohesion and solidarity.

### **DIVISION OF LABOUR AND DISINTEGRATION**

Durkheim maintains a distinction between division and disintegration. The state of disintegration is essentially pathological. Increase in the number of crimes, suicides etc offers examples of disintegration. On the other hand, division of labour is definite and deliberate attempt to divide the work according to interest, specialisation and social needs. Thus both are quite different from each other.

### **DURKHEIM'S OPTIMISTIC VIEWS ABOUT DIVISION OF LABOUR**

Emile Durkheim was cautiously optimistic about the concept of division of labour in society. *“Unlike Marx who saw the specialized division of labour trapping the worker in his occupational role and dividing the society into antagonistic social classes, Durkheim believed that the promise of the division of labour outweighed he problems.”*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> M.Haralombus in “Sociology- Themes and Perspectives” Page 237

Division of labour according to Durkheim, is a dynamic concept with an implication of progress. The struggle for existence intensifies with the increase in population. This leads to an extensive search for the means of livelihood and different types of occupations originate.

According to Durkheim division of labour is an important factor or variable which was responsible for many other social events. He felt that division of labour should not be studied in Economic terms only but it should have a broad basic social approach<sup>7</sup>.

### **ELEMENTS OF DIVISION OF LABOUR**

According to Durkheim division of labour is the outcome of contract which people conclude to meet their needs. In the beginning the contract was between members of family. Then it had only social and no legal bindings. But with the progress of time efforts were made to give these bonds some legal shape and some of the controls began to be exercised. Such control became unavoidable on account of increase in population and the integration of division of labour as an essential element of society.

### **DIVISION OF LABOUR NOT A STATIC CONCEPT**

Durkheim was of the view that the division of labour was dynamic and in no way a static concept. It is due to its dynamic nature that social progress takes place. But no division of labour should be accepted as dynamic which results in social disintegration, disorganisation or sharp division of society into employers and employees. Similarly it should not result in division of society into classes e.g., the rich and the poor.

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<sup>7</sup> Durkheim, Emile. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society* Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press.

## **THE LINK BETWEEN DIVISION OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY**

### **Meaning of the concept of Solidarity**

“*Social solidarity*” is synonymous with social cohesion or social integration. Social solidarity refers to “*the integration and degree or type of integration, manifest by a society or group.*”<sup>8</sup>

Social solidarity refers to “*the condition within a group in which there is social cohesion plus co-operative, collective action directed towards the achievement of group goals*”<sup>9</sup>

The basis of social solidarity is different in simple and complex societies. Durkheim made comparisons between the primitive and the civilized societies in terms of his concept of solidarity. According to him, the primitive society is characterised by “*mechanical solidarity*” based on “*collective conscience*”; and the advanced society is characterised by “*organic solidarity*” based on the “*division of labour*”.

### **1. Mechanical solidarity:**

As defined by Durkheim, mechanical solidarity refers to “*social solidarity based upon homogeneity of values and behaviour, strong social constraint, and loyalty to tradition and kinship. The term applied to small, non-literate societies characterised by a simple division of labour, very little specialisation of function, only a few social roles and very little tolerance of individuality.*”<sup>10</sup>

As Durkheim has stated *mechanical solidarity is a solidarity of resemblance*. It is rooted in the similarity of the individual members of a society. In the society where this kind of solidarity prevails individuals do not differ much from each other.

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<sup>8</sup> Collins Dictionary of Sociology, Page-621

<sup>9</sup> “Dictionary of Sociology” W.P.Scott, Page -406

<sup>10</sup> W.P.Scott in “Dictionary of Sociology” Page -407

They are the members of the same collectively and resemble one another because “*they feel the same emotions, cherish the same values, and hold the same things sacred. The society is coherent because the individuals are not yet differentiated.*”

Here we find the strong states of the “*Collective Conscience.*” Collective conscience refers “*to the sum total of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of the society.*”<sup>11</sup> This prevails mostly in primitive societies. The common conscience completely covers individual mentality and morality. “*Here social constraint is expressed most decisively in repressive, severe criminal law which serves to maintain mechanical solidarity.*”

## **2. Organic Solidarity:**

As defined by Durkheim, organic solidarity refers to “*a type of social solidarity typical of modern industrial society, in which unity is based on the interdependence of a very large number of highly specialised roles in a system involving a complex division of labour that requires the cooperation of almost all the groups and individuals of the society.....This type of solidarity is called organic because it is similar to the unity of a biological organism in which highly specialised parts or organs, must work in coordination if the organism[ or any of its parts] is to survive.*”<sup>12</sup>

Organic solidarity is almost the opposite of mechanical solidarity. According to Durkheim, increasing density of population is the major key to development of division of labour. This especially is witnessed in the modern industrial societies. Division of labour and the consequent dissimilarities among men bring about increasing interdependence in society. The interdependence is reflected in human mentality and morality and in the fact of organic solidarity itself. In organic solidarity, consensus results from

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<sup>11</sup> Simpson, George (Trans.) in Durkheim, Emile "The Division of Labour in Society" The Free Press, New York, 1993. p. ix

<sup>12</sup> Durkheim as quoted by W.P.Scott in “Dictionary of Sociology” Page 407

differentiation itself. The individuals are no longer similar, but different. It is precisely because the individuals are different that consensus is achieved.

*With the increase in division of labour the collective conscience lessens. Thus criminal law tends to be replaced by civil and administrative law. Here the stress is on restitution of rights rather than on punishment. An increase in organic solidarity would represent moral progress stressing the higher values of equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. Even here, the social constraints and laws continue to play a major role.*

### **EFFECTS OF DIVISION OF LABOUR**

Durkheim was not merely concerned with what the division of labour was, but how it changed the way people interacted with one another. Durkheim has tried to establish the role of division of labour.

He was concerned with the social implications of increased specialization. As specialization increases, Durkheim argued, people are increasingly separated, values and interests become different, norms are varied, and subcultures (both work-related and social-related) are formed. People, because they are increasingly performing different tasks than one another, come to value different things than one another.

*"In one case as in the other, the structure derives from the division of labour and its solidarity. Each part of the animal, having become an organ, has its proper sphere of action where it moves independently without imposing itself upon others. But, from another point of view, they depend more on one another than in a colony, since they cannot separate without perishing." (1933: 192)*

**Development of society:** According to Durkheim division of labour increases both the productive capacity and skill of the workman; it is the necessary condition for the intellectual and material development in societies. With the growth and development of division of labour the society becomes more efficient which in turn leads to social

progress. Progress gives birth to new vocations and inventions conducive for social development.

**Creation of solidarity:** Durkheim believes that the true function of division of labour is to create a feeling of solidarity between two or more people<sup>13</sup>. Durkheim elucidates that similarity and dissimilarity can cause mutual attraction. Dissimilarity causes attraction because of complementarity. Different people are inclined to unite because they possess different qualities that complement each other.

*"As the progress of the division of labour demands a very great concentration of the social mass, there is between the different parts of the same tissue, of the same organ, or the same system, a more intimate contact which makes happenings much more contagious. A movement in one part rapidly communicates itself to others."* (1933:224)

**Establishment of Moral Order:** Durkheim states that labour has a moral character which is very important to society. Durkheim states that immoral actions (such as crime and suicide) tends to increase in industrial society and do not contribute to credit of civilization. Division of labour goes beyond purely economic interests and constitutes the establishment of a moral and social order "*sui generis*"

Durkheim asserts that great political societies cannot sustain their equilibrium save by the specialization of tasks; the division of labour is the source...of social solidarity<sup>14</sup>. Comte argued that it was the 'continuous distribution of different human tasks which constitutes the principal element in social solidarity<sup>15</sup>.

**Trade and Economic Interdependence:** The division of labour makes trade necessary and is the source of economic interdependence. The division of labour has a moral

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<sup>13</sup>Kenneth D. Allan (2 November 2005). *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. Pine Forge Press. p. 102. [ISBN 978-1-4129-0572-5](#).

<sup>14</sup> Craig J. Calhoun (2002). *Classical sociological theory*. Wiley-Blackwell.

<sup>15</sup> Durkheim acknowledged that Comte was "the first to have recognized in the division of labor something other than a purely economic phenomenon" (1893: 62).



character because the needs which it fulfils for social solidarity, order, and harmony are moral needs.

*"But if the division of labour produces solidarity, it is not only because it makes each individual an exchangist, as the economists say; it is because it creates among men an entire system of rights and duties which link them together in a durable way."(1933: 406)*

**Rise of Organic Solidarity:** Durkheim didn't see the division of labour as the downfall of social order, however. He recognized that, in reality, the division of labour gave rise to a distinct type of social order, or solidarity: organic solidarity. Organic solidarity is social order built on the interdependence of people in society. Because people are forced to perform distinct, separate, and specialized tasks, they come to rely on others for their very survival.

**Promotes Interdependence:** Durkheim saw that without one another in a highly specialized society, no one can survive. This interdependence is why the division of labour does not destroy social order.

*"Through it, the individual becomes cognizant of his dependence upon society; from it come the forces which keep him in check and restrain him. In short, since the division of labour becomes the chief source of social solidarity, it becomes, at the same time, the foundation of the moral order."(1933:400-401)*

Thus we can conclude that: The division of labour splits the various processes of production into minute tasks, many of which can be performed by mechanical devices. It is this fact that made the use of machinery possible and brought about the amazing improvements in technical methods of production. Mechanization is the fruit of the division of labour, its most beneficial achievement, not its motive and fountain spring. Power-driven specialized machinery could be employed only in a [p.165] social environment under the division of labour. Every step forward on the road toward the use

of more specialized, more refined, and more productive machines requires a further specialization of tasks.

### **DIVISION OF LABOUR AND ANOMIE**

"**Anomie**" is an adverse consequence of unregulated division of labour against which Durkheim has cautioned. In fact Durkheim was the first to use this concept. The Greek term "**Anomie**" literally means "without norms" or "norm less". Durkheim never uses the term normlessness; rather, he describes anomie as "a rule that is a lack of rule," "derangement," and "an insatiable will."<sup>16</sup>

“Anomie” is the outcome of the clash between one's own values and those of the society when one is not clear in what way to go, how to behave and how to come up to the expectations of the society and also how to mould the environment to suit one's expectations<sup>17</sup>.

*“Anomie is the strict counterpart of the idea of social solidarity. Just as solidarity is a state of collective ideological integration, anomie is a state of confusion, insecurity and normlessness. The collective representations are in a state of decay.”<sup>18</sup>*

**State of Anomie Leading to Personal and Social Disintegration:** The essential problems of modern society, Durkheim argued, is that the division of labour leads inevitably to feelings of individualism, which can be achieved only at the cost of shared sentiments and beliefs. The result is anomie. Social norms become confused or break down, and people feel detached from their fellow beings. Having little commitment to shared norms, people lack social guidelines for personal conduct and are inclined to pursue their private interests without regard to the interests of the society as a whole.

<sup>16</sup> Mestrovic, Stjepan. *Emile Durkheim and The Reformation of Sociology*.

<sup>17</sup> Gerber, John J. Macionis, Linda M. (2010). *Sociology* (7th Canadian ed. ed.). Toronto: Pearson Canada. pp. 97. ISBN 978-0-13-700161-3.

<sup>18</sup> D. Martindale as quoted in W. P. Scott "Dictionary in Sociology" Page 12

Social control of individual behaviour becomes ineffective, and as a result the society is threatened with disorganization and disintegration<sup>19</sup>.

Durkheim was probably correct in his view that the division of labour and the resulting growth of individualism would break down shared commitment to social norms, and it seems plausible that there is widespread anomie in modern societies.

## **CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE THEORY OF DIVISION OF LABOUR**

The first and most important criticism that has been levied against Durkheim is that in this theory he has taken only population and nothing else into consideration. In this way he has least cared for other social factors.

The second criticism which has been made against this theory is by Barnes who says that his concept is obviously biological rather than sociological and gives biological rather than sociological explanation of the need of division of labour<sup>20</sup>.

But in spite of all these drawbacks it can't be denied that Durkheim's theory of division of labour is extremely relevant and useful because it discusses the relationship of population with social progress and advancement.

## **CONCLUSION**

The philosophical idea which underlines the theory of division of labour can be summed up in the following words of Raymond Aron<sup>21</sup>: “The individual is the expression of the collectivity itself.....It is the structure of the collectivity that imposes on each man his peculiar responsibility. Even in the society which authorises each man to

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<sup>19</sup> The Division of Labor in Society, The MacMillan Co. 1933, Free Press edition, 1964, p. 370

<sup>20</sup> J.A. Barnes, ‘Durkheim’s Division of Labour in society’, Man,NS, pp. 158-75

<sup>21</sup> Raymond Aron in his ‘Main currents in Sociological Thought’ Vol II

be himself and to know himself, there is more collective consciousness present in the individual consciousness than we can imagine.’’

*Collective imperatives and prohibitions, collective values and things held sacred are needed to bind individuals to the social entity*<sup>22</sup>.

Hence Durkheim felt that only if all the members of a society were tied to a common set of symbolic representations or to common set of beliefs about the world around them, the moral unity of the society would be safe. ‘‘Without them, Durkheim argued, any society, whether primitive or modern, was bound to degenerate and decay’’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Allan; Kenneth D. Allan (2 November 2005). *Explorations in Classical Sociological Theory: Seeing the Social World*. Pine Forge Press. p. 112. ISBN 978-1-4129-0572-5.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Aron in his ‘‘Main currents in Sociological thought’’ Vol II

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