
UNIT 8 DOMESTIC MODE OF PRODUCTION*

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Describe the mode of production and its various forms.
- Describe the fundamentals of domestic mode of production.
- Discuss various forces of production and the relations of production.
- Explain the Marxist critique of domestic mode of production and the responses; and
- Understand about the politics in domestic mode of production.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit 7, you learnt about the pastoralists and the horticulturalist; their life and ways of survival and nature. In this unit we will explain to you about the domestic mode of production.

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Society has witnessed various shifts in its evolutionary stages which can be understood through its transition from one mode of subsistence to another each characterised by different economic patterns. One such mode is domestic mode of production. This unit will enlighten about the basic notions of mode of production and its various forms. The unit will shift from a general understanding of the modes of production to the domestic mode of production. It offers various facets of the domestic mode of production such as the social relations, forces and means of production as well as relations of production. It highlights some of the critiques that domestic mode of production has faced and a response to each. This unit also enlightens about the political aspects of the domestic mode of production.

8.2 MODES OF PRODUCTION

Mode of production is one of the key ideas in economic sociology in which human labour is converted into energy through using various technologies that existed in human societies since long. Various technologies involved in the modes of production include tools, skills, knowledge, manpower, and so on. Marx believed that various stages of human societies cannot be determined by what they produce but by the means and forces of production (Rosenswig, 2012). This indicates that the determining factor of various stages of society's evolution is how they produce as well as the means of producing material goods. There is no single mode of production in a given society. There can simultaneously be two or more modes of production (Jessop, 1990). However there is one dominating mode of production which determines the overall economic nature of that society. Here we will briefly discuss four modes of production as identified by Marx.

8.2.1 Asiatic mode of production

Asiatic mode of production is explicitly an original mode of production that existed in human societies and is distinct from other pre-capitalist mode of production characterised by slavery. Asiatic mode of production existed in the primitive communities where people collectively own the land and thus there was an equal distribution of all the produce. Social relations in this mode of production were kinship based and it was a classless society. Scholars argue that this mode of production does not help understand the history of Indian society.

8.2.2 Ancient mode of production

Ancient mode of production is the preceding mode of capitalist mode of production. Unlike Asiatic mode of production, this form of production mode is characterised by slavery wherein master owns the slave and appropriates all the material goods produced from the labour of slaves. Slaves were deprived of their right to reproduce. Their reproduction depends on how capable the society is to get newer slaves. Therefore growth rate of the slaves is determined through the total number of newer slaves. Rate of production never determines the growth rate of slaves. Also, they are considered as aliens and thus denied the right to have offspring.

8.2.3 Feudal mode of production

Feudal mode of production refers to a mode of production which is primarily concerned with the 'existence' of labour in which ruling class appropriates what

is produced by the labour. Like capitalism, this mode of production also involves the exploitation of tenants by the feudalists i.e. the landlords. In this mode of production, tenants had no property rights. They were forced to sell their labour as well as the products of their labour and so they could not meet the required level of products for their subsistence. They were also forced to fulfil the demands of the feudal landlord either in the form of money or labour. In addition to this, they had to pay taxes for their family belongings. Paying rent constitutes an important part of the feudal mode of production. The exchange of agricultural products and other products in markets was introduced in feudal mode of production (Karanti, 2014). This aspect of feudal society laid the foundation for the capitalist mode of production according to Marx.

8.2.4 Capitalist Mode of Production

Capitalist mode of production refers to the mode of production which involves selling the produce for making profit. In this form of production, the ownership lies with the dominating class of capitalists. There is an exchange of labour power against money in the form of wages. Labourers are hired on contract basis by the employers and they are paid for their labour. The control over all the material goods so produced by the labourers is in the hands of the capitalists. Karl Marx considers capitalist mode of production as a historical stage in the evolutionary process of society which he believes will be taken over by socialism. You will learn more about capitalism in the next few latter units.

8.3 DOMESTIC MODE OF PRODUCTION

One of the key concepts in economic sociology is the production system. The underlying notion of the domestic mode of production is the fact that its origin can be traced from the evolutionary stages of society. Domestic mode of production was one such stage in the evolutionary phases of a society characterised by social relationship, especially kinship. Members of these societies work collectively to convert natural energy into domestic commodities by using human labour, knowledge, through having skills and through the use of tools. The level of production and the amount of consumption among members of a family is determined through their requirements and there is always a restriction on production and consumption.

Domestic mode of production is not all about the production but it is also about consumption and circulation of the produce (goods). Unlike capitalist mode of production characterised by disparity in the dominant and the dominated, domestic mode of production is quite distinct from it. In domestic modes of production, the level of consumption is of prime importance and is the basis for any prevailing discrimination. Also what distinguishes capitalist mode of production from the domestic mode of production is that the former involves wages or payments for production as well as consumption while as the latter entails no paid production but it is rather maintained; since domestic mode of production is kinship based production and therefore kinship ties are maintained through production and consumption levels. It means that there is an interrelationship between production and consumption of goods; and circulation of goods does not depend on the monetary exchange. Also the selection and consumption of goods does not depend on the value of these goods. Mode of production of goods involves circulation of

goods also. Since kinship is the chief feature of domestic mode of production, the circulation of goods is among the kins from the male side only, and governed through inheritance rules most of the times.

Mode of production originated from the anthropological work of Eric Wolf, who was inspired by Karl Marx. However domestic modes of production originated from the works of Meillassoux who published "*Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the domestic community*" in 1981. Domestic mode of production has family and lineage as primary production and reproduction units (Meillassoux, 1981). This kind of production is for self-sustenance where social relations are not determined through the means of production but through controlling the means of human reproduction. Marx also stressed that human consciousness is determined through labour works. However, labour in domestic mode of production is organized on the basis of kinship ties and, therefore, there is no domination or power relation. For this reason, domestic mode of production is also called by many as kinship based production. A common example of this form of production can be subsistence producers such as cultivators who cultivate to feed themselves and their families rather than to earn money out of the produce. In this production system, for example, male members of a family perform the tougher roles in the farm such as clearing the fields. Other members of family engage in sowing the seeds. Children protect the crops from being stolen. Men pick out the non-cultivated plants to let the crop plants grow and harvest them. Women dry the produce so as to store it for consumption in future. This is an illustration of how labour and the process of production are organized by the families depending primarily upon gender and age.

8.4 FORCES OF PRODUCTION

Forces of production stand for the means through which products are yielded from the natural resources. It refers to the extent to which nature is controlled by humans. Control over nature depends upon the availability of human power and their skills besides other equipments. Therefore, with the advancement in the forces of production, there is a greater control over the nature; and the less the manpower, lesser will be the control over nature. These means of production include all types of tools used for production such as machines, labour, skills and other forms of technology. Besides, technological advancement, changing processes of labour, new energy and working knowledge are also considered as the forces of production. There are some scholars who consider geographical sites also within the category of forces of production. Any change in these modes of the forces of production will affect the production process.

Societies practicing domestic modes of production witness changes continuously in the production forces due to the prevailing social order. Causes of these changes are natural such as soil erosion, deforestation, drying of rivers, and so on. However, changes can sometimes occur due to the technological advancement paving way for the new forces of production in the form of new instruments. But this advancement informs about the extent to which people struggle in order to convert natural resources in the sources of livelihood through using labour. This struggle is an attempt by the people to overcome scarcity of resources through the development of forces of production which further makes their lives better.

Forces of production also steers the human knowledge in terms of how to increase the natural resources. The more the development of productive forces, more developed are the social relationships. During the course of this development and at a certain point through this development, conflict between the social relations and forces of production start due to the instability in social relations to control the forces of production. This results in the class struggle between the skilled and unskilled classes, wherein the former is fit for the prevailing economic market. Therefore, it is the development of the forces of production that enlightens about the history of socio-economic relationships. Forces of production actually correspond to the powers of society to produce more from the natural resources.

Activity 1

Interview members of two families in your neighbourhood. Find out which profession they are involved in i.e. the adult population.

Based on your interview results prepare a list of occupations and modes of production and write a brief essay on “modes of production in my neighbourhood”. Discuss it with your peers at the Study Centre.

8.5 RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

The origin of domestic mode of production lies in the construction of patriarchy as the root of class based society, a revolution continuing till today. This social revolution transforms societal structure into the forces of production. Scholars argue that male dominance in the production system has taken over the female dominance that existed in hunting and gathering societies. This brings an end to the idea of communism and collective rights over natural property. This transformation was encouraged by the idea that male members must preserve natural wealth through circulation on patrilineal ties instead of matrilineal ties. As a result of this, males gained dominance over the females. This overtaking of the female right changed labour into a form of slavery (Leacock & Safa, 1986). This further transformed men and women into classes based on non-market social relationship which is controlled by ideology and power which appropriates the labour of women. Some scholars argue that the shift from female dominance to male dominance helps maintain efficiency in the modes of production. In their attempts to appropriate female labour, there is a violent struggle over the latter. On the other hand, the efficiency of male labour brought in changes in the marital rules, which advocated patrilocal marriages for interests through exchanging women and further exploiting their labour. In this way, females turned out to be a new class in the domestic modes of production in which men became the dominating class.

Domestic mode of production does not offer economic aspects of the subordination of women. Neither does it offer other forms of women’s subjugation such as sexual violence. There are other varied forms of violence against women in the domestic mode of production which are oriented towards appropriating women labour. Child rearing is also included in women’s labour. However to escape this kind of labour, females put a limit on the number of births. But the control over birth limitations lies with men only by putting a ban on abortions. Also, terming

class relations in the domestic mode of production as purely gender based is wrong. Because class relationships were also governed by ideology, therefore ideologically some males were excluded from the newly categorised ruling class in the patrilineal system of production. They were considered as slaves to engage in labour work of different kinds other than those of women. In fact, class as a dichotomous model is not free from its shortcomings. But still it applies to the socially constructed dichotomies such as male and female, child and adolescents, aged and adult, and so on.

Box. 8.0

What Is Primitive Communism?



Meat sharing by Mbendjele hunter-gatherers is an example of a primitive communist practice.

(Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-primitive-communism.html>).

The idea of primitive Communism is based on the principles of custom and belief system that govern the production of goods and services in society. This is found in society based on traditional agriculture, hunting, gathering, and fishing where barter system is the primary mode of exchange. The idea of Primitive Communism was propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels where social relations were based on egalitarian and common ownership pattern. Further, the social relations are based on a collective right to basic resources in society. Hence it does not encourage private ownership of property as the food produce generated is consumed collectively without leaving behind any surplus of food. Thus, in society every abled person is engaged in food production and consumption on an equal footing no matter the modalities of collection of food be it through hunting and gathering. The tools and houses are communally owned. The division of labour is equally shared by both men and women. While women are engaged in gathering activities, the men are involved in hunting activities. People with vulnerabilities such as young, old and pregnant women are protected. The decision making is equally shared by men and women. (Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-is-primitive-communism.html>).

Relations of production are actually the social relations which can be categorised into two broad types. The first is the technical relations and the second is relations

controlling economy. The former has significance in the production processes while as the later are concerned with the property ownership. Relations of production are not to be misunderstood as the relations between the labour class and the employer class. In domestic mode of production, social relations are among the members of a particular community who engage collectively in the production process. Taking labour process from relations of production point of view, it entails the appropriation of products, a process which involves the members of one particular group. Members of other groups or some stranger, so to say, cannot appropriate the products. However, if there is some stranger who is not member of a particular group, he can appropriate the products only if he falls within the relations of production of that group. But generally, only people among the kinship group can be considered to be in the relations of production in the domestic mode of production.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Define mode of production?

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2) Pick the odd one out among the modes of production: Asiatic, Feudal, Capitalist, Ancient, Modern.

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3) What is domestic mode of production?

.....

4) Domestic mode of production is a non-kinship based mode of economy. True or False

.....

5) In domestic mode of production, circulation takes place through which type of relationships?

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8.6 CRITIQUE TO DOMESTIC MODE OF PRODUCTION AND THE RESPONSES

Domestic mode of production has suffered severe critique in the discipline of sociology. A few important ones and their counters are discussed below:

8.6.1 Domestic mode of production never existed

There are some scholars who believe that Marx and Engels could only discover the capitalist mode of production and therefore domestic mode of production never existed. Since Marx and Engels belonged to a period characterised by

capitalism in which women and children were exploited, this exploitation had its roots in the domestic mode of production. There are few others who argue that Marx and Engels though discovered the domestic mode of production however, they could not categorise it as a different mode because it has many traits in common with the capitalist mode of production.

8.6.2 Forces, relations and means of production were missing in patriarchal family

Marx and Engels argued that forces, means and relations of production were missing in the patriarchal family. However neo-marxists claim that what are various forces of production in the domestic mode of production is not difficult to identify. Some of the important types of forces of production as pointed out in the previous section are tools, labour, resources, and so on.

8.6.3 Difficult to trace the transition from lineage to domestic mode of production

To counter this argument, it is claimed that the transition from lineage mode of production to domestic mode of production was the result of certain obstacles that blocked the development of production forces. However social revolution cleared off all the blockages in social relations. There was equal circulation and consumption across the society. The growing surplus was the result of the emergence of new forces of production. The existing social relations did not allow any single lineage group to accumulate the growing surplus. The male elders in the existing relations let the surplus to be taken over by the patriarchal families. As a result of this, the means of production previously controlled jointly went into the hands of male members of the family and so went the surplus.

8.6.4 Men never became the heirs of production

Since men took over to control various means and forces of production, they became rulers in their respective societies. Part of the reason for this change lies in the sex-specialised roles which excluded women from carrying out certain activities due to their gender (Murdock & Provost, 1973). Women generally took over household chores only. This form of gendered distribution of work is termed as 'natural division of labour' (Brown, 1970). However in hunting and gathering societies, both men and women were equally involved in the social production. There was no gendered division of labour. The structure of household comprised the entire community within which both men and women were involved in the production process for the livelihood of entire community.

8.7 POLITICS IN DOMESTIC MODE OF PRODUCTION

Domestic mode of production is in itself an egalitarian form of production system. However, the notions of patriarchy determined through ideology and power reproduces this mode of production. The historical basis of domestic mode of production can be restructured in a way to fill the gap in analysing the oppression against women. The importance of this historicity lies in overcoming the difficulties in developing further the kinship relations which further augments

the production forces. There has to be some political force that can enhance the domestic produce beyond the level of consumption. In early societies, there were headmen, who though did not depart from the kinship based social relations, were more convincing towards producing surplus for use in times of crisis. There was a kind of reciprocity between the headmen and the people which obscured the exchange of goods between them particularly from people to headman. But the headman's approach towards society is always collective and welfaristic in approach than how people can individually think of their families (sahlins, 1972).

There are various political forces that accelerate the production process in myriad ways. In some societies characterised by domestic mode of production, men as dominating characters exploit their own groups. They rearrange the produce in their extended groups in order to accomplish political status. In some parts across the globe, there are leaders in lineage groups who control all the resources collected jointly. Due to their political influence, these headmen organised feasts out of the collective resources thus exploiting the labour of others in the social relations. Domestic mode of production thus remained a subordinate way of production among other modes of production and its chief feature being the availability of unpaid labour.

Check your progress 2

- 1) Mention the reason why Marx and Engels believed that domestic mode of production never existed?

- 2) Marx and Engels were of the view that forces and relations of production existed in patriarchal families. True or False

- 3) Domestic mode of production is characterised by (equal/unequal) circulation of goods.

- 4) What do you understand by natural division of labour?

- 5) Which force can enhance the domestic produce beyond the level of consumption? Domestic force, Political force or Production force

8.8 LET US SUM UP

Domestic mode of production is a kinship based production system characterised by labour relations. It is a collective mode of production for subsistence. Though there are various modes of production that existed in our societies which have

been briefly discussed, however this unit particularly deals with the domestic mode of production. In any mode of production, there are means, forces and relations of production. This unit informs about the forces and relations of production that prevailed in the domestic mode of production. It defends some of the major critiques that domestic mode of production suffered. The unit further enlightens about the political aspects in the domestic mode of production.

8.9 REFERENCES

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8.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Mode of production is a process of converting human power into energy through the use of technology.
2. Modern
3. Domestic mode of production is a way of subsistence involving production and reproduction of resources.
4. False
5. Patrilineal

Check your progress 2

1. Marx and Engels though discovered the domestic mode of production but they could not categorise it as a different form of production than capitalist mode of production.
2. False
3. Equal
4. Natural division of labour refers to the division of labour based on sex or gender of the person.
5. Political force