

The Division of Labour in Society and Contemporary Issues: An Analysis from Durkheimian Perspective

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Abstract

The society we live in today witness enormous specialization of roles which in turn leads to the increase of human dependency in contemporary world. The Durkheimian concept of transition from mechanical to organic solidarity shows this perfectly and is clearly relevant here in discussing the kinds of solidarity that maintains the cohesiveness in today's world. This paper discusses about the Durkheim's division of labour in comprehensive manner and how changing social solidarity have influenced and changed the way a society works and interacts. This paper touches the issue of this changing solidarity through rapid urbanization and how technological advances have added to this specialization of roles. Durkheim considered this division of labour as law of nature., people either desire for jobs which are intense, concentrated rather scattered over a wide area or, they are forced to do so. In either case it is considered to increase cooperation because it increases human dependency. However, Durkheim have also introduced the abnormal forms which results from it, for example due to extreme specialization of labour they become easily isolated and strive to discover their existential value in the labour market. This paper will be discussing about the results of technological advancements leading to extremely specialized roles in the virtual world.

Keywords: Division of labour, mechanical solidarity, organic solidarity, urbanization.

Division of labour is not only an economic arrangement but a social entanglement woven in the fabric of dependency. From pre-industrial to industrial socio-economic evolution, Durkheim lucidly explained the factors behind and also the resultant pathologies of such division in his seminal literature. He propounded terms like 'mechanical solidarity' and 'organic solidarity' to describe the evolutionary nature of socio-economic structure. Mechanical solidarity is something where the social and economic cohesion is founded on commonalities like shared beliefs and similar roles, like in small-scale primitive societies where there were less opportunities to explore. And on the other hand, organic solidarity is something emanating from the compulsion due to the irreversible system of socio-economic build, like in a post-industrialized set-up where dependency is built organically. Hence, division of labour and dependency is interwoven and with the passing of time, these dependencies are multiplying and opening up more layers, organically.

This phenomenon is not isolated from defects and looming risk of demolition of the very socio-economic structure it is built on, with domino effect. Durkheim calls these defects metaphorically as 'pathologies' with the capabilities to defunct the whole system, just like dysfunctional one organ of the body holds the capabilities to defunct the other organs. Anomic

division of labour, forced division of labour, poorly coordinated division of labour etc. are organic failure according to Durkheim. The discussion about the inability of moral and social elements to accommodate the structural evolution can also be found in Marx's alienation theory. Technological advancements most appropriately exemplified by fourth Industrial revolution gave birth to gig economy- an economic set-up where labour is not long term but mostly on-demand, transient, and short term. Often referred to as 'gig workers', they are contract based, short-term workers hence they are mostly part of extremely specialized division of labour force, but not necessarily serving equally valuable inputs in the labour market or being equally skilled. With unpredictable socio-economic climate like post-covid world and artificial intelligence, these specializations and dependence are turning even more complex and untraceable which require exhaustive analysis.

The Theoretical Framework:

Emile Durkheim in his book 'The Division of Labour' in society talks about this and gives a deep understanding of this phenomenon. It was first published in 1893. Though a previous translation appeared in English in 1933. Durkheim in his three books namely, The Functions of the Division of Labour (Book I), The Causes and Conditions (Book II), and The Abnormal Forms (Book III) talks about different aspects of this phenomenon.

In the first book Durkheim specifically talks about mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity and also about the transition. He also talks about the consequences of organic solidarity. In the second book the causes including the secondary factors are discussed. And finally in the third book, the abnormal forms or the pathological forms are discussed namely anomic division of labour, forced division of labour and the third one which he describes as only another abnormal form are discussed.

Division of labour is the phenomena where the labour or workforce in society is heterogeneous or are engaged in different or diverse occupation. In the pre-industrial society people were engaged in mainly similar kind of activities. Society was full of homogeneous activities. Because it was a pre-industrial society, agricultural activities were the prime occupational investment and workforce was unvarying. People found a kind of unity and uniformity because of the similarities in the nature of activities. This is known as mechanical solidarity where society is identical in most cases. That is why mechanical solidarity is also known as solidarity arising from similarity.

In Durkheim's word, mechanical solidarity is,

"Social solidarity based upon homogeneity of values and behavior, strong social constraint, and loyalty to tradition and kinship. The term applied to small, non-literate societies characterized by a simple division of labour, very little specialization of function, only a few social roles and very little tolerance of individuality (Scott, 1988.) ."

But, as society developed and machine-based production started with Industrial Revolution, the form and way of labour force changed and a heterogeneous societal set up emerged. It is opposite of mechanical solidarity. Just like different biological cell or organs in a body, there

are extreme specialization of organs designed for very specific functions to be performed. According to Durkheim organic solidarity is,

“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 specialized roles in a system involving a complex division of labour that requires the co-operation of almost all the groups and individuals in the society. This type of solidarity is called organic because it is similar to the unity of a biological organism in which highly specialized parts or organs, must work in coordination if the organism [or any one of its parts] is to survive(Durkheim, 2023).”

This definition clearly describes that though different but coordination among these organs is very important for proper functioning, without which pathological forms are inevitable, which we will discuss later.

The Causes Behind:

Durkheim rejected the perspective from psychological or individualistic sphere as causes of division of labour. And it is evident from the fact that Durkheim was doubtful about civilization being capable of any of the human happiness. He believed that civilization itself is the result of the differential human activities which they are bound to perform in order to survive in the changing situation that they are put in. Again, he believed that, division of labour doesn't happen because people chase for happiness. By assuming such, it will get reduced to individualistic or psychological limits, and according to Durkheim it is not possible because division of labour is the result of a long evolution. Thus, this happiness hypothesis was not regarded as a valid point to discover the causes of division of labour.

Then the question arises that what are the causes of division of labour? Durkheim believed not from psychological or individual point of view but it needs to be viewed from a societal context. Then Durkheim claims that the disappearance of segmental structure of society is the cause of division of labour in society. Now, how come this is possible may be answered by saying that, when social life instead of being concentrated in segments which are small and identical, starts to push beyond their limits, exchange movements and act and react upon one another, it is known as dynamic or moral density. And Durkheim says that this dynamic or moral density is directly proportional to the division of labour and results in eventual increase in that. Moral density is produced by mainly two factors or causes. These are, firstly, the reduction of real material distance between members of a society and that too both spatially (e.g. Growth of cities) and technologically (e.g. advancements in communication), because it increases the intra-societal relations. Secondly, the social volume or the total number of the members of society reinforces the previous effect. Thus, Durkheim believes that division of labour is directly related to the dynamic or moral density which is itself depended on material density and social volume. In order to make this point clearer, Durkheim here cites Herbert Spencer. Spencer argued that all the homogeneous masses tend towards differentiation because they all are unstable. Spencer believed such differentiation is possible due to the exposure of the parts of the mass to diverse physical environment. Durkheim however was not convinced that this diversity is sufficient to cause or result a dramatic phenomenon such as division of labour. That is why Durkheim again stated Darwin's Origin of Species (1859), which argue

that increase in material density and social volume results in division of labour, not because of exposure to the diverse external circumstance but because it makes the struggle for existence more acute. According to Darwin, when the population and resources are in balanced amount, that is when population is limited and resources are abundant then, similar organisms can co-exist peacefully. But when the resources become scarce and population increase, competition and conflict is inevitable and this conflict is more real when organisms are similar having and sharing similar needs. But when organisms are different and share different needs, conflict will diminish. According to Durkheim same law will be applied on human population. However, Durkheim finally argues that division of labour is possible only among members of an already established or constituted society. But here Durkheim talks about yet two another secondary factors namely conscience collective and heredity to be significantly reduced. Conscience collective is the sharing of common ideas, ways of living, thinking which produces a sense of unity and similarity in conscience which is common. Thus, it is important that this conscience collective becomes less concrete. The other secondary factor which is heredity was also to be reduced at least for two reasons, these are, firstly, due to heredity practice aptitude appear to be less transmissible the role of determining individual capacities reduce. Secondly, those capacities that heredity could transmit (e.g. Instincts) also reduce with social revolution in number and strength. Thus, these two factors being reduced causes division of labour along the first cause.

The Solidarity of Cohesiveness:

It was in during 18th-19th Century that Industrial Revolution did strike the societal set up globally. Prior to Industrial Revolution there were agrarian societal structure and predominance of human labour. But the transformation from agricultural society to machine-based production and industrial and urban set up specially in Europe and America is history. It brought about changes in labour or workforce, and employment and occupation structure. It was not only production of new labour forms but replacement of human labour with big machines. But this replacement did not mean that humans were not at all required. In fact, humans were required to control and operate those machines. And thus, the importance of skilled and trained labourers was increasing. The working environment was hazardous and it was even more dangerous for the unskilled and untrained labour force because they had less wages and they could be easily replaced.

Although the first Multinational Business Company dates back to 1600, when the East India Company was established, but it was only after the global acceptance of free market economy and globalization worldwide that these Transnational Companies and Multinational Companies could flourish the way it is today. only in the late 19th & early 20th Century the world's connectivity grew very quickly. The MNCs and TNCs have been controlling the labour force worldwide due to globalization. It implies that though different countries follow different patterns of transformation but the dynamics are closely interrelated.

On November, 2015, in Bergamo an international conference named 'The Great Transformation of Work' was organized by the Doctoral School in Human Capital Formation and Labour Relations (University of Bergamo) and ADAPT (Association for International and

Comparative Studies in the fields of Labour Law and Industrial Relations) which discussed different aspects of the transformation of work. Many important papers were presented there. And one of the most important factors that received major importance is technology. Technological advances over the last decades have altered the way one can imagine a workplace can be and a workforce can occupy positions. It has presented a virtual workplace, where people occupy important position sitting at home. Fixed timing of working has also changed. It is only because of technological advancements that freelance working is possible in virtual workplace which is the 'new geography of work'. Technology is believed to be creating 'fourth industrial revolution'. Fourth industrial revolution which is also known as Industry 4.0, is the name which is given to this technologically advanced trend which include cyber-physical system, cloud computing and internet of things etc. talking about Internet of things (IoT) which is the network and connectivity of devices and software which collect and exchange data and make it possible to have meaningful exchange in virtual medium is the reason behind the digital marketing or the increasing digital labour or workforce. Today, the number of people engaged in digital platform or number of people working behind a screen but controlling other labour far away or number of people engaged through this medium in workforce is countless. But how is it related to the solidarity discussion of Durkheim? A very simple example can be given to clarify this point. In a traditional setup, if a person needs to hire a cab he will just hire the cab directly. But with technological advancements, a person can book a cab on his electronic device, mostly in cell phones using an application to do so. Thus, we notice that in the previous case there were only two persons involved in the scene i.e. the passenger and the driver. But in the second scene, there are more people involved, along with the driver and the passenger there was the software developer who made the application and possibly the team. Though they may not be directly visible in a particular situation, but we can see a clear labour which is working as a mediator in between. If technology was not that advanced, this hidden layer of labour force adding unique and added value to a service would not have been possible. Again, in some home delivery application, along with the software developer, there is also the appearance of the delivery persons. Applications like Uber, Ola, Flipkart etc. are managing labour force worldwide in that manner. Technological advancements can be said to be creditworthy for creation of job positions like software developer, webpage or logo creator, digital labour or online content creator among others. These are definitely specific and highly specialized jobs. But specialization is different from functional importance without which pathological or abnormality arises as described by Durkheim which we will be discussing in the following section.

The Abnormal Forms and Pathology

Like any other social fact or like any other biological process, there are abnormal forms or abnormalities with the division of labour. Durkheim in his third book talks about three forms of abnormalities.

The first form is defined as anomic division of labour, which was already identified by Comte. In this kind of abnormal form, the individual feels isolated from the society and lose the sense of togetherness of the larger whole that they are a part of due to the extreme specialization of tasks that they occupy. This is a reflection of the lack of proper integration and mutual

adjustment of the parts of the organs of the society. Durkheim gives certain commercial and industrial citation and also of conflict between capital and labour. If we take the contemporary situation here to describe this phenomenon, we get that the extreme division of labour with technological advancements and change in labour force or occupational opportunities this kind of abnormality is seen very often. The intensity of integration in the occupation of the person in his work should be considered here to determine the pathology causing anomie. Generally, when people are engaged in very specialized roles and in repetitive mode in an industrial set up and become isolated from the employer and detach from the whole system feeling not connected with it, there arises anomie. To fix this, the conditions of organic solidarity or the healthy integration and co-dependence of different organs must be determined or restored as per. In contemporary times, with technological advantages the workforce mainly engaged in the virtual world feel definitely so. Of course, with urbanization and industrial growth people do feel isolated. But the rising isolation experienced by the new workforce working through technology is often left unnoticed. Labour such as webpage developer, logo designer of company, software developer, delivery persons etc. can no way feel connected with the whole of the system they are part of. Industries are anyway too huge and cumbersome production system to connect with each and every worker. The workers in turn perform very specialized duties that they sometimes do not feel their work important enough or to be more correct they do not understand how their labour is in any way contributing to the whole system. They eventually feel isolated, and detached from the system and anomie peeps in. In an industry, each and every part of the product is prepared by different workers. Sometimes workers don't even realize whatever they are preparing are for what purpose. Thus, when the worker doesn't have the sufficient view of the whole system, detachment from the system at personal level takes place. The virtual workplace is making the condition even worse. Marx's idea of alienation shares a similar emotion with Durkheim's concept of anomie in workforce. Marx also believed that under a capitalist set-up, the labour force is isolated and alienated at different levels. First, from the product they themselves produce as they do not see the final outcome and they are just a part of the whole; second, from the process which feels meaningless to them because it is monotonous; third, from the fellows; fourth, from the potential they hold. "Cog in a wheel" was used as a metaphor to describe this loop of excruciation. Durkheim had a similar view, as it can be derived from his work that extreme specialization of labour is unable to produce contemplation for the workers who is just a part of a chain.

Forced division of labour is the second form of pathology. This kind of abnormality arises when the division of labour is not spontaneous but forced. The perspective of traditional practice is very much relevant here for example caste-based occupation or even Weber's status group. This form of abnormality prevents a person to perform as per the individual capability and there is a forced imposition. The caste-based occupations have certainly diminished or at least minimized due to urbanization, industrialization and changing work culture. But it can't be said that there are not any labour in today's society followed by any imposition. This results in sometimes important position being filled by unapt persons. Post-Covid economy forced people in bulk, starting from corporate to manual labourers to forego their pre-established work eco-system and embrace works they do not feel they belong to. If survival at the time of crisis can be blamed for such compromise in the contemporary times, then caste-based forced labour

too can be categorized in the same frame, as a social environment of helplessness was created where striving for survival forced to continue the traditional diversification of labour. In either case, the pathology of forcefully abstaining a person from his capabilities and engrossing him into something unknown is common.

In book III chapter III, Durkheim talks about the final or another abnormal form. This takes place in an industrial or commercial society where the workers lack sufficient scope to perform. Lack of co-ordination worsens this situation. What Durkheim tries to imply here is that, for a healthy solidarity in society it is not sufficient to have only specialized jobs or occupations, but it is equally important that these jobs are functionally important. If we take into consideration of the paper, 'Some Principles of Stratification' (1967), by Davis and Moore, they claim that a job is functionally important if it is functionally unique and if other functions are depended on it. However, Davis and Moore could not perfectly describe functional importance and missed the point that the dependence is mutual. Durkheim here admits that perfect solidarity exists only when each organ perfectly co-ordinates so that each organs works perfectly through mutual dependence. Here, Durkheim gives the example of biological organs citing Herbert Spencer. Here Durkheim compares a human respiratory system with a frog's respiratory system, claiming that if one organ stops working then the other organs depended on that will eventually stop working ending the whole system at last. But according to him this dependency is possible only if the function of that organ is important. That means if a function is unique and functionally important enough to have the power to stop other organs because it is important enough to be relied upon, then it is also important for the solidarity process to keep it proceed smooth. That is where the contemporary workforce must be regulated. Unlike past, work today is permanent occupation, and thus it is extremely important that it is functionally important and also it makes sense to the worker.

Conclusion

When David Emile Durkheim wrote about division of labour it was exclusively about the new changes came about by the Industrial Revolution. But this paper made an attempt to relate it not only to industrial set up but also to the continuously changing workforce and climate of work place. It is well realized now that the more works are divided, more they become continuous. Work force at the age of Artificial Intelligence is a discourse that requires a whole new survey. Artificial Intelligence have consolidated services at a common platform sourcing labour, knowledge and service which are pre worked out. In this scenario, the extent of abnormalities of division of labour is insurmountable. The 21st Century witnesses all of the possible diversified, specialized labour that one can think about. Works seems to be quite important because with urban set up, people come closer and are more depended upon one another. Naturally in an urban set-up with industrialized economy, dependence of factors is inevitable, and more so for a service sector-based economy like India. Division of labour is intrinsically linked to dependency in a social and economic system. Eventually we all are connected at different layers, and dysfunction in organ will affect us too. Perfect solidarity is not created an overnight, it is an evolutionary process of which everyone is a part. Division of labour and resultant dependency can't be reverse and eliminating the resultant pathologies seems intractable, but averting the future malady from all the contemporary developments at

labour market and service sector will depend on valuing the labour at the recipient's end, re-organizing the structure to place skilled ones at the right place, upskilling the existing work force, and unhiding the labourer from the product of labour. Only if labour and the product of labour can be complementing each other with matching skills and sense of belongingness coupled with its visibility of importance, can a true discussion on answering the issues of division of labour in contemporary times take place.

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