Lecture - 11
Sociology of work-I: Need for work

Well friends as I told yesterday, today we are going to discuss another issue. That is the issue of sociology of work.

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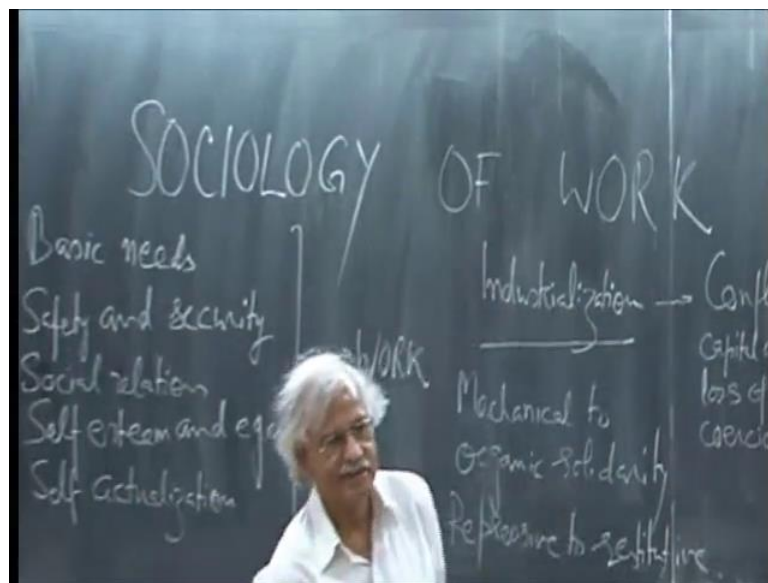
We spent about 4 hours discussing the nature of the state and its implications for society and other institutions of society. Today, we will talk about work. There is no doubt that work is central to life in any society, especially in the western society, which is industrially more advanced. There is very little residue of feudalism tradition or ancient traditional society. When somebody asks who you are, type and the expectation is that you will say that I am a teacher or I am an engineer or a medical representative administrator or a statesmen because people get identified with what they do work. Work is so central to life.

I was thinking how to begin this discussion and what to cover in sociology of work. There are many things. When I read the chapter on work in p Gisbert, I was not very happy. It is not a very well written chapter on work. So, I thought I will use Gisbert, but go beyond Gisbert to give you an idea of work. It is relationship with society. Remember

that when sociology is discussed, anything, it may be work, it may be education, it may be state they are interested in. What is that? What is what the essential features of that are? We are going to discuss as society has changed, what kind of changes have taken place in that? How that thing or that fact relates to other facts of society?

So, when we talk of work, then obviously we want to know what the organization of work or system of work was in pre-industrial society. It means in ancient society, in horticultural society, in agricultural society, advanced feudalism, then society of arts and crafts or guilds a more advanced civilization trade commerce industry. Now, we say that we are in the stage of post-industry. How the nature of work has changed in ancient society work was central and collective for survival. The whole community of people would engage in work; together all the people are working. What was work? Work was related to search for food, herbs, medicines, roots, fruits, leaves, stems, which they could eat hunting of animals for their survival. This was work and the work was done together.

Work did not produce any special status for anyone because work was same. When work is same, when everybody is engaged equally in producing things for survival, then distribution of things produced Gisbert call them utilities. Anything which satisfies our needs is called utility. The things, which have a utility, may be called goods. To use economics language, there are producers' goods and there are consumers' goods. In that kind of society, there was no inequality either because everybody had to survive.

So, the food procured from cultivation or hunting was shared by all members of the community. There was no inequality. Gradually, as society advanced, we call that man is a tool making animal. Man started making tools. This leads to development of science and technology. It became possible for men to produce more than what he needs to survive. So, it generated surplus etcetera.

Now, people who are able to survive and also produce something etcetera. So, that means that some people need not work when it is possible to produce more than what you need. What the community needs? What the group needs or tribe or banned or clans and sub-clans need? Then, some people can be freed from the responsibility of work. So, many types of activities started, which were not directly connected with work.

This is how like priests, politicians or statesmen, poets, intellectuals, philosophers in some or other form artists, painters, people made sketches. We can still find traces of

sketches made by artists several 1000 years ago in caves in different parts of the country. In Bhopal, you find some caves, where sketches of people drawn 1000 of years ago are still preserved. So, people started doing all those things. This is how society started getting divided. We call it division of labor that people started engaging in different kinds of activities.

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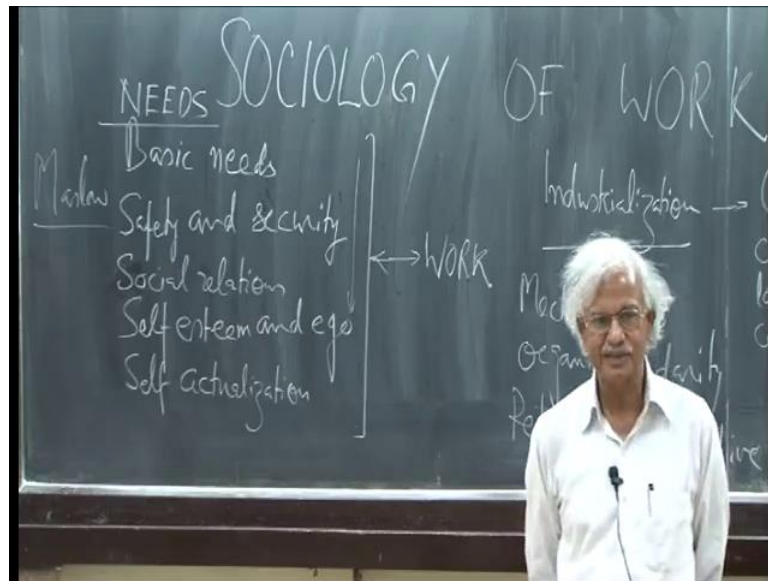
I thought that I can begin this lecture by showing how all need. You know all types of needs of people are related to work in modern society or in industrial society society. Today, we have various types of needs. When I started connecting needs to work; immediately, classification of needs made by one very famous psychologist and management guru AH Maslow came to mind.

Maslow said that people have various types of needs. These needs can be arranged in a hierarchical order means hierarchy means that satisfaction of one need leads to emergence of another need in man. What are these needs? There is a basic need. Basic need is food survival. The first and foremost need of human being is to survive to protect life. All of us want to protect our life.

For protecting our life, we need food, food, food, cloth, shelter. This is the basic need. We cannot remain without food for long. We cannot remain without water for long. So, water, food, we need water and food. To have water and food, you have to do work right from the beginning from a stone age from ancient societies whether people engage in

shifting cultivation or settled agriculture. There are horses and other animals, camels, buffalos, cows, goats, a society of that kind based on animals, animal power more of animal power or industry to satisfy our basic needs. We have to work for food for basic needs.

Once our basic needs are satisfied, and then arise another type of needs, safety and security. Then, you want to be safe and secure. We are surviving, but apart from food, there are many other types of risk also. These risks may come from other tribes, other communities, other clans, other countries or may be from other parts of this universe or may be from epidemics or may be from natural disasters, devastations, starvation, floods, famines, droughts.

There are both kinds of risks, risks, which are from nature and risks, which are from men. We have to protect ourselves from both types of risks, safety and security. Men want to be safe and secure. To satisfy those needs again, he has to work. What works are related to safety and security? Like in our society, there is a separate class of workers, which specialize in providing security industrial security force army police.

They keep us secure and safe. So, there is a work. We want to be safe and secure. For safety, we also build better houses, which are more protected. In place of living in kutcha houses, we want to live in pakka houses. We lock our houses. So, we need to produce bricks. We need to produce cement. We need to produce iron. We need to produce locks for safety and security that produces lots of work, lots of types of work for a fuel. A biomass, a wood is no more available.

If coal is also not available so freely, then we depend on kerosene gas, petroleum products. Lot of people, lakhs of people, may be millions of people today worldwide are involved in works related to production of petroleum items. There are regulatory authorities, visible control prices. Then, you require transportation so safe. There are many works, which are associated with safety and security.

So, we need to survive and produce. Certain works in traditional or in ancient society, most of the work was confined to satisfying basic needs, hunting and survival. People hunt or look for forest based food items and survive, but once people feel more secure in terms of survival, then safety and security security from wild animals, security from armies of others or other tribes. So, we develop armies. We have soldiers. We have

security guards, police. We construct better houses. We make bullet proof jackets, so many things; so many works are related to safety and security.

Gisbert takes a different route. I thought that this can be a more interesting way of looking at work. So, let me try to relate needs to work social relations. When man finds that he is now safer and secure survival needs are met, men feels safer and secure also. Then, what does he do? Then, he wants to connect with others. He makes friends. He builds a relationship with other people. These relationships may be on the basis of lineage blood relationship, husband wife, brother sister, parent children.

In some societies, you have very elaborate arrangement of kinship blood relationships. Traditionally, among Hindus, you felt connected to very distant relatives, fathers, cousins, wives, family members. You got connected to them. They are our own people. We are connected to them

When they meet in Mumbai, Surat or Bangalore, our people from UP will first introduce themselves to others. From which state you are? It is UP. From which district you are? It is pratapgarh. Which caste are you? It is yadav. Then, they enquire about each other's parents, from which village, from which part. They will say they will like to feel to be close to each other. So, if they are closely connected, if they discovered that they are closely connected that the other part is somehow connected to their maternal uncle or paternal uncle or somebody, they feel happy.

If they do not find themselves to be connected so closely, then they will they will start asking other questions that my relative, my relative was married in that village. People of that village were married in that village and ultimately they will discover some connection. The moment they discover some connection may be very distant, they feel happy. Human beings are not happy just by surviving or just by feeling secure. You want friends. You want relatives. You want networks.

The Facebook satisfies this need for social relations imagine community not face to face relationship. But, you feel close to all those people whom you meet on facebook, LinkedIn. You feel connected to people all LinkedIn. You are in the same profession. You you believe in similar ideas about work, about society, about politics.

You feel happy that there are lots of people who think like you, social relations, and neighborhood relations, social relations. Now, this need to satisfy need of social relations also produces lot of work in our society. Matrimonial, e-matrimonial, newspaper matrimonial, they are all producing works for some people. So, that people get connected by telephones, mobiles, social network for social social relations. You want social relations. Nobody feels happy in isolation.

If you are a normal human being, you will not feel happy. If you do not have friends, you need to be connected. Remember, sometime in the beginning, I said that according to Emile Durkheim for normal person, there is a normal integration between ego and society extreme form of alienation or separation from society, which will mean absence of social relations. Absence of social relations can lead to suicide. Though in extreme cases, too much identification with society can also make you prone to commit suicide. Social network is another need of ours.

We want to share our ideas. We want to talk to someone. We we we want to have groups, in which we have we feel may be we will discover. We will create a category of we will create a category of the category of social. If you are in Kanpur, then people belonging to your family only are your close friends. If you belong to Kanpur and you are in Gorakhpur, then any other person belonging to Kanpur is your own. Then, all kanpurias become your friends.

If you are in Bhopal, then not only kanpurias, but all the people belonging to UP become your friends. So, it is a social category. If you are abroad, if you are working in Singapore, then all Indians are friends. You want to frequently visit those places. There are some such places everywhere where more shops are owned by Indians, where most Indian things are sold, where you can create, you can feel an Indian type of atmosphere.

So, in the rest of Singapore, you may not find say motorcycle, scooty. You may not find Bengali paintings, Bengali songs, Tamil songs, Hindi songs. You create a situation. If you are in Singapore, you create a situation, you create a slum somewhere or you create a mutual part of the city where you have specialization in meeting and in selling Indian things. So, that is, so you see what sociology tells us that everything is social. So, what is that is social?

As long as you are in Kanpur, only your own family members are your or may be very close friends or very close neighbors, but when you are away, when you are in Singapore, the whole India becomes your friend. Even Muslims are for Hindus. Muslims will also be relatives. If you are in in India and in your native place, you are a Muslim, and then Hindus are not friends. If you are a Muslim and you are in Singapore, then even Hindus from India are your friends.

So, categories keep on changing according to there is a very good phrase in Indian language. Many Indian languages of which the words are from Sanskrit sociology tell us that everything depends on social relation. That is another need. The need for social relations creates so many types of works need to connect to people most of the time. You see I do not have data. I am not aware if some sociologists or anthropologists have collected data on this issue.

If you conduct a survey of how much time on telephones, mobiles, internet, e-mails is used for different purposes, work related purpose, sometime you are using mail regarding work. You want to clarify something with other scientists. You write a mail for administrative purposes to seek some clarification. You make a request to your boss through e-mail that is also one purpose. If you analyze data on e-mails, I am quite sure that 85 to 90 percent of the time of mobile, telephones, e-mails is being used for building or strengthening or maintaining or creating new social relations.

Social relations are so wider that when you have social relations also, then self esteem and ego seem important. You want to feel that you are important. If you are not important in the company of your friends, then what is the use of making friends? You do not want to make friends. You do not want to connect to people.

If you feel insecure or small or idiot or insane to your friends, you do not want to make friends. They are insane idiots, imbecile duffers. They will not make friends. Nobody wants to tell himself that my friends treat me as though I am an idiot, self esteem, prestige, ego, and my ego. I want to see from symbolic interactions perspective my self esteem and my ego. They are heavily dependent on my reading of others reactions towards me. I tell you that you are a very good student. You feel happy because I am making some sentence. I am making a sound actually.

If you do not understand my language, you will not be able to understand what I want to say. I am only making some sound, but when we share lots of things, lots of norms including linguistic norms, then you want to know what I am saying, what I am uttering. When you find that I am saying you are a good student, you interpret in your language that a good student is this.

You want to look like a good student. You felt happy yesterday. Outside, 2, 3 students told me that you are a very good teacher. I was so happy. My salary did not rise. I will get the same salary, the same ordinary for teaching course. But, they told me that you are a good teacher. I felt very happy because it is it is a matter of self esteem and ego. The difference between ego and self esteem is that there are two things actually here.

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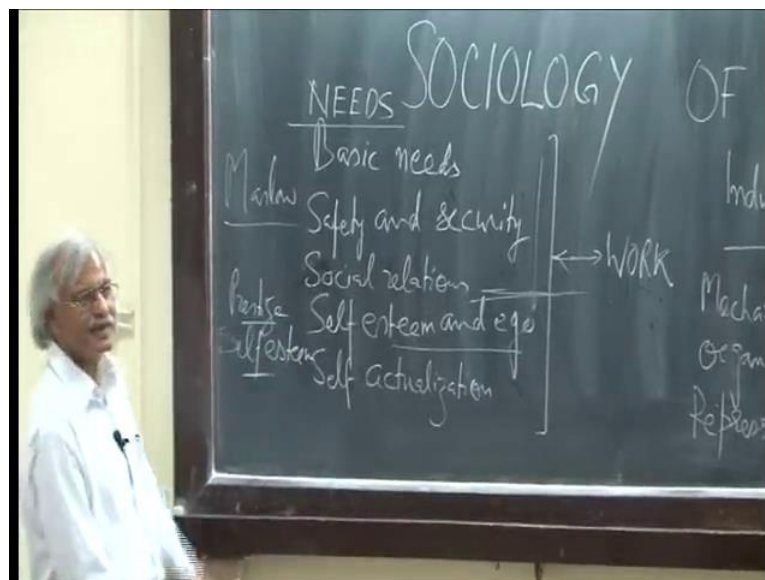
One is prestige. Prestige of what you do and self esteem of how well you do it. So, prestige of a mess manager is higher than the prestige of mess workers. Prestige of the clerk who sits in the office is higher than the prestige of mess workers. I remember very well that when I was warden in one of the hostels, then one mess worker was belonging to the caste of thakurs.

He was a pathetic case actually because he could not reconcile the fact that on one hand, he belongs to the caste of thakurs, kshatriyas. On the other hand, he was working as a mess worker. In a pathetic sense, it became a source of pain suffering for him. He

suffered from various psychiatric diseases, which were rooted in his feeling of inconsistency between mess workers status and thakur's status.

In the same work of mess workers, many other workers were very happy people who came from those backgrounds were in their village. They had nothing to eat. They came to this place. They become mess worker. Then, they were regularized. They were entitled to health centre facilities, l t c facilities. They got good salary; regular salary. Nobody made any cuts in their salary. They were very happy.

In the same situation, this thakur is not happy. He developed several problems. He started avoiding work. He would never clean utensils. He does not want to peel vegetables. He just wants to supervise things. He became a psychiatric case. Then, because he cannot avoid this work when he is in the mess, so he started taking leave. For leave, he wants some excuse. All these things were happening at the deep psychological case.

So, he required leave and for leave, he must have some excuse. So, he started making excuse that I am suffering from this disease that disease. Then, he started suffering from pseudo cardiac arrest heart problems, which where pseudo actually. When he was taken to a proper health centre outside Kanpur, they told him that he is not suffering from any physical disease. He was suffering. He was personally suffering from a disease. The root of the disease was that he was a thakur and he was working as a mess worker.

When I was warden, he came to me. I also had mercy on him not because he was a thakur, but because he was suffering. So, he came with a request and unfortunately another root of his problem was that his wife was educated. She was working as a teacher in a decent school in Kanpur. If he had illiterate, rural wife, not working, traditional type; may be he would suffer less. That was another source of inconsistencies in his life that he was a thakur, his wife was educated. That lady was working in a decent school and he was a mess worker.

I was warden of hall 4. He was at that time in hall 4. So, he came to me that sir, show me some compassion at least for some months. Transfer me from mess to office. Salary will be same. Everything designation will remain same. Everything is same. I asked him that what purpose it will serve if I transfer you from mess to officer. He said sir, I have a grown up daughter.

Now, we are looking for a suitable groom for her. If I tell in other thakur's my relatives that I am working in the office, I am a clerk or a senior clerk, and then it will be easier for me to arrange for her marriage. If I tell them that I am a mess worker, then they will look down upon me. So, we transferred him for 2 to 3 months to the office. I do not know what happened after that because then my warden ship was over.

So, we want this is prestige. Prestige of an office clerk is higher than prestige of a mess worker. Prestige of an engineer, an analyst, a consultant, a leading advocate, and advocates is higher than the prestige of an agricultural worker. All of them are workers. Advocate is a worker. Agricultural worker is a worker. Construction worker is a worker. Security manager is a worker. Director is a worker. Dean is a worker. Everybody is a worker. Who are non workers?

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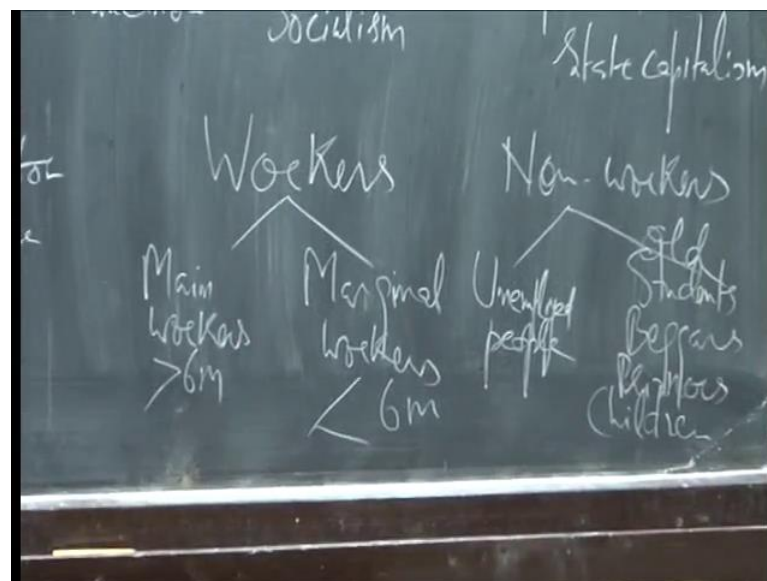
In Indian census, we divide workers into 2 categories, main workers and marginal workers. Main workers are those who work for more than 6 months a year. Marginal workers are those who work for less than 6 months a year. Non workers, the non workers may be of 2 types. They may be unemployed. Sometimes by convention, we treat unemployed persons also as workers with 0 month of work.

Unemployed people are those who are available for work. They are available for work. They want work, but they do not have work. They are not hired by anyone, educated

unemployed youths. They are educated. They want to work. There is no employment for them.

In cities, in at cross roads, you will find lot in the morning lots of manual workers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and wage laborers sitting at one place with their tools sometimes expecting that somebody will come and hire them for few days of work. If somebody comes and hires them for few days work, then they become worker, otherwise they are non worker unemployed. They become unemployed.

The term unemployed will be used only for those who want to work, but who have not got any work. They are unemployed people and others others are students, beggars. I am putting them in the same category; students, beggars, inmates of jails, prisoners. Dependants, infants, children and old people cannot work. So, we have different categories of people, workers, non workers in workers in Indian census.

Different countries have different conventions. Main workers are those who are in regular work. Others are those who are in irregular work, marginal workers, unemployed people who want to work, but they do not have work. Then, there are others, old people, children, students whom we are still training to work efficiently later on in life. Many types of works will require long duration of education and training.

So, to this new generation of youths, we are providing training. After sometime, we will become old. They will become workers. It is a sequential status. They are not 2 different classes. They are not 2 different social classes or communities. It is a matter of time that today, they are students. Tomorrow, they will be workers. Today's workers will become old destitute, beggars, prisoners, and children.

Now, different workers do different kinds of works. There is a difference in prestige. Prestige of an IAS officer is much higher than prestige of a rickshaw puller. That is the meaning of prestige. There is ego. You want to have prestige in society. Self esteem is another thing. Self esteem means whatever work you have whether you are an IASs officer or you are a sweeper or you are a professor or you are a journalist or a rickshaw puller or a shopkeeper, whatever work you do, if you do it well, you think that you do it well, then you have high self esteem.

In estimation of yourself and in other's eyes, if you are good that is self esteem. Lastly, connect this with work. You are looking for that kind of work, which will give you a more prestigious job. Again, there are so many works associated with distribution of prestigious jobs or hierarchy of prestigious jobs among the job seekers self actualization.

Self actualization ultimately means that when all these needs are satisfied, you have food, you have house, and you have water. You feel protected, safe and secure no threat from nature, no threat from other community or other countries. You have good social relations. You are happy with your work. You think that you know your work well. You are a good worker, and then this is self actualization. Now, at this stage you want to do something in accordance with your image of yourself. It is like this may be you you want to write poetry.

Many students associated with say Hindi literary society here, they want to write poetry or essays, but while you are studying in IIT Kanpur, you do not get sufficient time to write poetry. Some of our students write very good poetry. If they start studying literature in place of books of complex numbers, they will write much better poetry. May be their study, deep study reading of poetry will definitely fetch them padmashree or padma vibhushan one day.

This will not happen to them if they just devote themselves to thermodynamics, physics, probability and statistics and fluid dynamics. They are not interested in that. So, at least, you become quite mature and well established in your job. Now, I am at a senior position in the company. I have constructed 2 houses, one in my native place for my parents, one in Delhi for myself, children. They are also doing well studying in Delhi public schools. So, everything is good. Now, you have prestige. Your ego is satisfied. Then, you start writing poetry.

There are many incidences in which after the age of 40, 45, after settling down well, people start writing poetry why are they doing this is for self actualization. I am through work. I must express myself in accordance with my understanding of myself. I am a poet. I am not an engineer. I am not an analyst. I am not a consultant. So, let me write poetry. Now, yesterday in our UGC, under grants commission, this is a time to discuss cases of termination.

So, we were discussing an interesting case of one student who has been terminated because CPI, SPI was low. It was found that it is not that student does not have potential. He is good jai rank. He has good earlier scores. First semester scores show that the student is brilliant. He has a lot of potential, but fortunately or unfortunately, he developed a greater interest in sketching painting arts that kind. When he started sketching, he ignored his studies. So, CPI, SPI are affected and he is a part of the list of terminated students.

Now, we recommended that case. We said that he is a brilliant student. Let us recommend for the next semester. Let us re-state him, but also advice him not to go for sketching. I do not know what we are doing. We do one thing committees in formal positions. If looked from purely dispassionate objective point of view, I do not know whether we are doing a right thing to make him an engineer at IIT Kanpur. We tell him or we terminate him and say that you completely devote yourself to painting sketching arts.

Maybe if we terminate him and guide him properly society, I mean society if society guides him properly to become a good artist, there is a possibility that at the age of 55 or 60, he will get padma vibhushan of our art. If he if he becomes an engineer, he will be ordinary because his heart is not there. But, in formal committees, we will say that I do not know whether this is a right decision from social or humanistic point of view. In formal positions, we have to take decision.

This is because somehow, all of us think, you will also think in the same way that students interest are associated with survival in B. Tech program. This is the dominant thinking. We are guided by this dominant thinking that let the students survive because students interest are associated with survival in B. Tech program in IIT Kanpur, which maybe a wrong assumption. So, this is self actualization sometimes or other than in self actualization.

Let he become a social worker. You want to be a social worker. So, once you have established yourself, you won. All these things produce work and not only all these things produce work, they lead to work. You have an inner desire to self actualization, which maybe in any form, it maybe in the form of becoming a high level spiritual group. So, at the age of 55, 60, you become a yoga guru. Before that, you are a management

guru or engineering guru. Then, you become a spiritual guru, religious guru. You become a politician or you become an artist, film artist or a small screen artist. You take up social activity self actualization.

This generates lot of work otherwise these works are not associated with this, but for many people. Then, you also throw in economic term called backward forward linkages. This is because some people have to satisfy the need for self actualization. Some people want to present themselves as artist, t v artist, film artist, directors, and producers. So, this will generate lot of work for those people who throw their work in related industry are trying to satisfy their basic needs.

So, work is related to our needs. Not only this, you know work also helps in satisfying all these needs. These needs result in work. Work results in satisfaction of various needs. So, for you, work is not something through which you only sustain yourself though work. You also want to maintain good social relations prestige. You want to have high self esteem. You are looking for that kind of work, which also gives you opportunity for self actualization. This is because these are the needs of human beings. These needs of human beings are producing several types of work.

Then, we are trying to satisfy these needs in different societies. We satisfy our needs in different ways, pre-industrial agricultural or post-industrial different works, and different ways of satisfying these needs. So, this is one aspect of sociology of work. Now, sociologists have looked at how work has changed. As society has changed, work has also changed.

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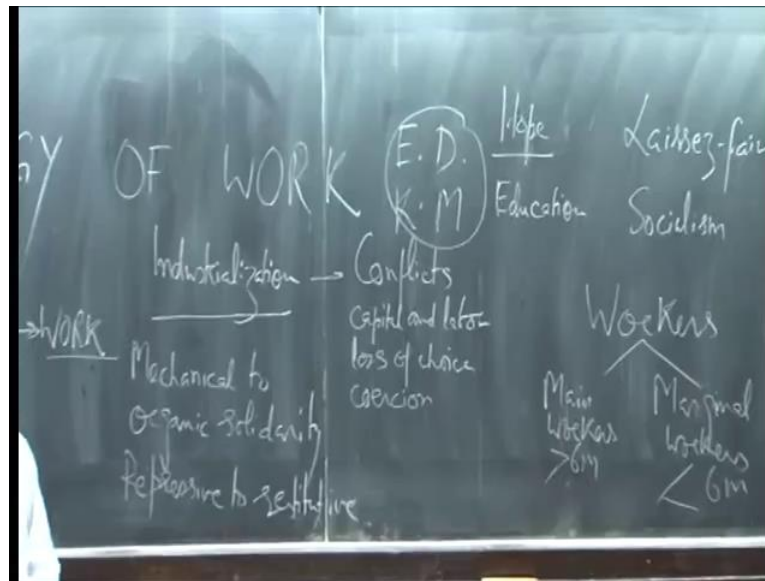
Two most important sociologists who will explain how work has changed are Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. Emile Durkheim gave the concept of division of labor.

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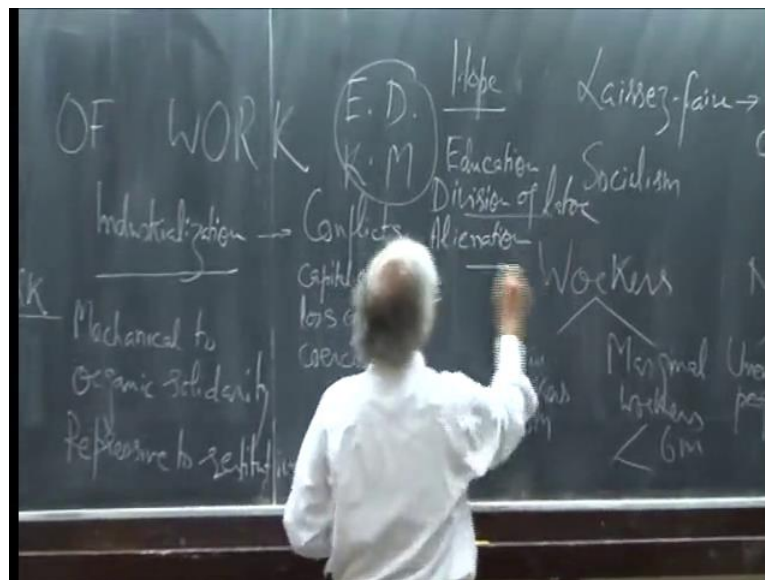
Emile Durkheim gave the concept of division of labor. Karl Marx gave the concept of alienation.

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Thank You.