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Directorate of Distance Education

M.A. [Sociology]

I - Semester

351 12

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

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INTRODUCTION

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In sociology, sociological perspectives, theories or paradigms are complex theoretical and methodological frameworks used to analyse and explain the objects of social study. They facilitate organizing sociological knowledge. Sociological theory is constantly evolving, and can never be presumed to be complete. New sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them, but classic sociological theories are still considered important and relevant.

Whereas the field of sociology itself and sociological theory by extension is relatively new, dating to 18th and 19th centuries, it is closely tied to a much older field of social sciences (and social theory) in general. Sociology has separated itself from the other social sciences with its focus on society, a concept that goes beyond nation, and includes communities, organizations and relationships. Sociological theory is not just a collection of answers to queries about the nature and essence of society. Not only it provides many answers, it also offers help in putting better questions and further developing research projects that can help better understand the complex social phenomena. Like any other subject of science, it is always under development in response to the changing dynamics of our social lives as well as the increase in sociological knowledge.

The adventure of sociological theory is comparatively new spanning just about two centuries. However, it is very closely connected to a long history of social thought dating back to Greek philosophers, Roman lawyers, and Jewish and Christian religious scholars. This period can be termed as the prehistory of sociological theory. Their systematic way of thinking about society laid a foundation for the sociological thought capable of understanding and expressing the emerging complexities in society. Sociologists use empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop theories about human social activity. The goal of sociologists is to develop theories that will help explain the social world and make predictions about the future of the social world.

This book, *Sociological Theories*, discusses various classical and modern sociologists, their concepts of sociological evolution and the various theories they propounded. It is divided into fourteen units that follow the self-instruction mode with each unit beginning with an Introduction to the unit, followed by an outline of the Objectives. The detailed content is then presented in a simple but structured manner interspersed with Check Your Progress Questions to test the student's understanding of the topic. A Summary along with a list of Key Words and a set of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit for recapitulation.

BLOCK - I
INTRODUCTION OF SOCIAL THOUGHT AND
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

*Overview of Sociological
Theory*

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UNIT 1 OVERVIEW OF
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Structure

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to demarcate limits for a field of academic discipline is obviously futile. Still, when we attempt to maintain a limit or demarcate a discipline, we knowingly or unknowingly assimilate something we should have excluded. What seems today firmly ingrained as part of our specific discipline, yesterday may have been alien content; and tomorrow might set itself outside our assigned boundaries as an independent discipline attempting to mark its own limits. Yet, no student/beginner can be expected to rightfully enter an academic field without knowing its standard definition and central problems worth-study. In this unit, therefore we will attempt to provide an overview of the discipline of sociological theory, discussing its basic concepts as well as its problems.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Demarcate the exact boundaries of sociology as an academic discipline

- Distinguish between sociology and other disciplines
- Examine the central problems of sociology and how to tackle them

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1.2 WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

Since the beginning of human history, the observation, analysis and reflection of human-society have been topics of interest for thinkers and analysts. It was Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who, for the first time, introduced us to an independent, autonomous and systematic discipline for the study of societies and societal groups in which we live. This new discipline was termed as 'Sociology'. The term 'sociology' is derived from the Latin word *socius* and the Greek word *logos*, meaning the 'opinion and/or knowledge about the society'. As the etymological meaning of the term indicates, this new discipline depended upon two distinct sources: one social and the other philosophical.

It is to be noted here that in the beginning, Auguste Comte was a bit sceptical about this 'hybrid' character of sociology, though later, he clearly expressed his satisfaction by saying that this 'hybridization' of the discipline has been satisfactorily compensated by getting the benefits of the two traditional disciplines: social and intellectual.

1.2.1 Origin of Sociology

Historically speaking, the discipline of sociology is still in its nascent phase. In fact, several prominent thinkers have expressed their opinion that 'the discipline of Sociology has still not come out of its infancy'¹. It is an agreeable fact that several thinkers have worked upon the understanding of social issues even before the discipline was born: Aristotle's *Politics* (during early Greek philosophy) and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (during classical Indian age) are some of the relevant examples here which provided a systematic study of the socio-political systems and are of interest to the social thinkers even today.

Still, it can be rightly said that as an independent and autonomous discipline, sociology was introduced only in the 19th century. In his prominent text *Reason and Unreason in Society* (1947), M. Ginsberg has observed that,

Broadly, it may be said that sociology has had a four-fold origin in political philosophy, the philosophy of history, biological theories of evolution and the movements for social and political reform which found it necessary to undertake surveys of social conditions.

The historical background of the origin of Sociology (as an independent and autonomous discipline) may be traced back to the time between 1750 to 1850. Literally speaking, the above-mentioned duration ranges from Montesquieu's

¹ Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, 1952.

De l'esprit des lois to the works of Auguste Comte himself, and from Herbert Spencer's earlier works to the theories of Karl Marx. The formative period of sociology as a distinct discipline is considered to range from the second half of the 19th century to the first part of the 20th century.²

1.2.2 Characteristic Features of Sociology

A brief survey of the historical background of the emergence and development of sociology helps us in establishing some characteristic features of the discipline. These are as follows:

1. **Sociology is *encyclopaedic* in nature:** The subject-matter of sociology ranges from the social life of man to the whole of human history. It does become synthetic, all-inclusive and encyclopaedic in nature.
2. **Sociology is *evolutionary* in nature:** Being influenced by biology, the subject-matter of sociology becomes evolutionary in nature, as it tries to observe and understand the broad stages in socialization. It tries to change its nature, scope and methods in accordance with the changing needs and expectations of the society.
3. **Sociology is a *Positive Science*:** Being influenced by Natural Sciences (like Physics and Mathematics), the subject-matter of sociology is claimed to have borrowed heavily from scientific methodologies of research. It is, therefore, considered a positive science.
4. **Sociology is the *study of particularities*:** Though sociology attempts to construct some general laws of social evolution, it also studies particular social, political and economic issues of the 18th century. That is why, in the beginning, it was also considered as the science of 'particular societal problems'.
5. **Sociology is *scientific and ideological* character:** Sociology, as an independent and autonomous discipline, claims to have both conservative and radical ideas at the same time, and has consistently learnt from the conflicting theories.

1.2.3 Development of Sociology

In their attempt to establish fixed and demarcating characteristic features of sociology (as an autonomous discipline), the earliest sociologists like Auguste Comte, Kim and Max Weber, and others tried to establish their primary objective as the explanation and analysis of social phenomena and change leading to some conclusion on the basis of sociology's relationship with other social sciences. Several thinkers attempted to show their inclination against the previous outlook. They tried to

² As mentioned by Raymond Aron in *German Sociology* (London, 1957) and *Main Currents in Sociological Thought: 1890-1930*, (Volume II, London, 1967). Some useful details are also found in H. Stuart Hughes *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought: 1890-1930* (London, 1959).

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show their inclination towards those residual subjects which were not considered as the subject-matter of any other social science. In this way, they tried to pinpoint and narrow down the objectives of Sociology as a discipline.

However, in the last couple of decades, sociology has found some new directions influenced by the works of C.W. Mills such as the *White Collar* (1951) and *the Power Elite* (1956). The *Sociological Imagination* (1959) with this sociologist has turned back towards analyzing the larger issues of social development and changes. In doing so, Mills has introduced a more controversial but questioning approach towards understanding social phenomena. This new development seems to be closer to the approach taken by early social thinkers. It led to a revived interest in the fundamental issues related to the historical evolution of societies. It also led to some kind of renewed version of Marxism as a general theory.

The latest developments of the new aspects of sociology as historical and social anthropology has come to us as a clear outcome of the gradual development of third world countries and their respective societies. Now, the word 'history' is not only attached to the nations of Europe and North America, but also has to include a great deal of Asian and African narratives. With this, sociologists have found a new kind of compulsion to expand the horizons of sociology and the subject-matter of the discipline.

These new developments have obviously brought about a plethora of new ideologies and new study-material that have to be added along with the fundamental issues of the discipline. Despite all these developments, the central issue of sociological thought is still the understanding of each society in its totality.

On the basis of the above-mentioned discussion on the origin, nature, scope and development of sociology as a distinct, independent and autonomous discipline, its starting problems have to be pinpointed as making the core issues of the discipline. However, it is to be remembered here that to demarcate the limits of any intellectual discipline remains ambiguous at the end. As the prominent social thinker Alex Inkeles has said,

Any attempt to set limits to a field of intellectual endeavor is inherently futile. For it is to be noted here that any such attempt to pinpoint the central problems should be considered as a loose way of defining the subject- not as a rigid and unchangeable demarcation point.

1.2.4 Different Approaches to Study Sociology

The definition of sociology can be established with three different approaches:

- (i) **The Historical approach:** In this approach, we first of all try to question ourselves- 'what were the founding fathers trying to say?' In other words, we try to understand the simple problems and traditional interest of the discipline by making a historical study of the available facts and theories.

- (ii) **The Empirical approach:** In this approach, we ask ourselves- ‘what is being done in the discipline right now, what are our concerns and what is expected from us?’ Here, we attempt to understand the contemporary situations so as to know the exact issues on which most attention is to be paid.
- (iii) **The Analytical approach:** In this approach, we ask ourselves ‘what does our reason say and how to conceptualize our outcomes?’ Here, we deliberately demarcate the concerned subject-matter by allocating it through various disciplines.

Each of the above approaches provides enrichment to the process of understanding the discipline. Therefore, it would be incorrect to consider one approach better over the others. In fact, all these approaches provide alternate perspectives to understand the same subject-matter.

Check Your Progress

1. Why is sociology considered a positive science?
2. What was the primary objective of the earliest sociologists like Comte, Weber and Marx?

1.3 CENTRAL PROBLEMS OF SOCIOLOGY

Auguste Comte, for the first time, tried to demarcate the subject matter of sociology. He believed that the study of social sciences in his own time had the same kind of concerns for its future as once Alchemy had with modern-day chemistry or as astrology had with modern-day astronomy. He also believed that the sections and subsections of the discipline could be made only in the distant future where we are clear about facts, priorities and preferences; and nothing can be said about them right now. However, he suggested that the study of sociology should be done in two different parts:

- (i) the social statics
- (ii) social dynamics

Let us try to understand them:

In social statics, the primary concern of thinkers would be the major institutions working in and for the society, for example family, state, economy etc. The thinkers are supposed to understand the nature and interaction of these institutions in general. According to Comte, they cannot be understood individually and distinctly, for their existence depends upon the phenomena of mutual relationship. Therefore, they should be treated only in combination. That is why, Comte accepted ‘universal and social interconnection’ as the master-thought of this division.

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The second division, known as the social dynamics, means the study of the different parts of society and how they relate with each-other, develop as per requirements and evolve over times.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was of the belief that almost every society moves through certain fixed stages. If we analyse these different stages, it might be possible to understand their nature as well.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) discussed the concerned field of sociology in a more precise manner than Comte in his prominent work *The Principles of Sociology*. He believed that the subject-matter consists of certain familiar elements in a particular order. The division of sociological study as presented by Comte and its influence can be clearly seen in Spencer's work.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was the next thinker in the line who talked about the special field of sociology and emphasized on the 'era of specialization' in sociology in his book. Like Comte and Spencer, Durkheim also focused on the values of interrelationship of different social institutions.

Max Weber (1864-1920) considered sociology as '...a science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects.' (*Theory of Social and Economic Organization*)³.

All of the abovementioned thinkers, Comte, Spencer, Durkheim and Weber, are known as the 'founding fathers of sociology'. All of them seem to have fundamental agreement on the central problems of sociology, which are as follows:

1. Sociology studies a wide range of institutions from family to the state. All of these institutions have to be analysed from a distinct sociological perspective and methodology.
2. All of the social institutions are always found to be in interrelationship with each other.
3. These institutions should be studied with a purpose of explaining/ understanding why society should be taken as a distinct unit of analysis and why societies are alike or different in nature.
4. Regardless of the institutional background, a sociologist should focus on 'the social acts' or 'the social relationships'.

To understand the central concerns of the discipline, a broad review of problems and prospects of sociology was published in 1957. This was the kind of survey deliberately constructed to understand the major branches of sociology. Under the supervision of a special program committee, around thirty sociological specialties were chosen for the analysis and the result was finally published in

³ Weber insisted that a sociologist must study social action by interpreting the motivational processes of the actors in their situational, historic or symbolic context. It means putting oneself in others' position and coming to understand his specific actions.

one of the most widely referred book called *Sociology Today: Problems and Prospects* (1959).

With this work, the familiar issues of sociology were formally established: sociological theory, sociological methodology, individual and society, family, kinship, marriage, ethnic relation, and so on. Some of the other important problems are deliberately omitted for the lack of space. Overall, the subject-matter was exactly in accordance with what the founding forefathers of Sociology have already discussed. Later, the *American Sociological Review* (1959) established the central problems as social control and deviance, differentiation and stratification, scientific methodology etc.

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1.3.1 A General Outline of the Central Problems of Sociology

All of the abovementioned resources of Sociology seem to agree on the central problems of Sociology. We can therefore construct a general outline of the central problems of sociology on which everyone would agree. It is best expressed in Alex Inkeles *What is Sociology? An Introduction to the Discipline and Profession* as follows:

A General Outline of the Central Problems of Sociology:

I. Sociological Analysis:

- Human, Culture and Society
- Sociological Perspective
- Scientific Method in Social Science

II. Primary Units of Social Life:

- Social Acts and Social Relationships
- The Individual Personality
- Groups (including Ethnic and Class)
- Communities: Urban and Rural
- Associations and Organizations
- Population
- Society

III. Basic Social Institutions:

- Family and Kinship
- Economic, Political and Legal
- Religious
- Educational and Scientific
- Recreational and Welfare
- Aesthetic and Expressive

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IV. Fundamental Social Processes:

- Differential and Stratification
- Cooperation, Accommodation and Assimilation
- Social Conflicts (including Revolutions and War)
- Communication (including opinion formation, expression and change)
- Socialization and Indoctrination
- Social Evaluation
- Social Control
- Social Deviance
- Social Integration
- Social Change

Most of the present-day sociologists agree with the abovementioned central problems of sociology with minor alterations and omissions here and there.

1.3.2 Sociology as the Study of Different Aspects of Society

Each and every social study has its own distinct problem of study, which provides uniqueness to the discipline. For example, political science deals with the ways in which power is used in the societal set-up. It studies government and authority, power and responsibilities and the institution through which they are exercised. In the same fashion, sociologists are also supposed to have some distinct problems that are not supposed to be the subject matter of other established disciplines.

All of the important components of the society, for example, family, social class, ethnic group, racial group, rural and urban communities, social classes and even crime are the central problems for the study in the domain of sociology. All of these issues provide the subject matter for a specialized branch of sociology. Each of these issues help in sociological research and theory-building.

Some thinkers are even of the opinion that the central problem of sociology should be studied in the decreasing order of size and complexity 'societies, institutions and social relationships'. In this way, we can divide the central problems of Sociology in three subsections:

- (i) Sociology as a study of society
- (ii) Sociology as the study of Institution and
- (iii) Sociology as the study of social relationships

We shall study them one by one:

- 1. Sociology as the study of society:** Sociology is primarily considered as a unique field of study that considers society as the subject matter of its study. The *prima-facie* objective of this study is to understand and analyse the different social institutions and their interrelationships in different social systems. Such a systematic study should have two different aspects:

- (i) the first aspect deals with the internal distinctions existing within a society, and
- (ii) the other aspect deals with different societies as a group of population with some distinct characteristic features and then tries to compare them with each-other .

In other words, it may be said that while the first aspect deals with intra-societal studies, the other aspect deals with inter-societal studies. When a government analyst asks the question about how the executive, judicial and legislative functions in a state, how they are related to each-other, how do they work for the central government? And so on, then such questions represent the first aspect of the study. When a thinker asks questions about the different stages of development in different societies, or why do specific civilizations survived only for a specific time-period, while others did not? Then this represents the second aspect of the study. (It needs to be noted here that the contemporary sociological studies are more inclined towards understanding the internal structure of the state).

- 2. Sociology as the study of social institutions:** Those institutions which work as the building-blocks of the society (such as family, School, hospital, church or some political party) are the most significant subject-matter of the study here. This is simply because of the reason that society as a whole has already been accepted as the subject-matter of a study in the disciplines of history and anthropology. Emile Durkheim in his book *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1901) mentioned aptly: ‘Sociology is the science of institutions.’ Some of the widely posed questions here are:

What are the common social features prevalent in almost all the institutions of the society? What role does family, kinship or marriage play in the survival and growth of a specific society? etc.

- 3. Sociology is the study of social-relationships:** As the society is considered a well-knit and complicated system of various institutions, in the same manner, social institutions may also be considered as a complicated system of relatively simpler social relations. For example, the family is a social institution that comprises of several distinct sets of relationships between spouses, between siblings, between parents and children, between grandparents and grandchildren and so on. We may study such social relationships for understanding their common traits and their dependents on various factors like size, duration and context of the group etc. These can be referred to as the study of social relationships.

Just as different institutions are studied to understand their typical features, similarly, the study of social relationships is done to understand and analyse the identifying and differentiating features of social institutions. Max Weber has considered the study of social relationships and acts as the primary objective of any social study. Thinkers like Leopold have considered the study of social relations

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as the only, true and distinctive subject-matter of sociology. Contemporary thinkers like Georg Simmel and Talcot Parson have agreed to the same.

We shall be seen in the further studies that most of the problems studied in sociology are also the subject matter of other established disciplines and vice-versa. For example, as an academic discipline, History considers the study of societies, cultures and civilizations as its subject matter and Anthropology also considers most of them as its central problems. In order to discriminate between these disciplines, not only the central problems, but also their objectives and methodologies should be taken into account.

As an overview, it may be said that the central problem of sociology may be broadly expressed in three fundamental questions:

- (i) what the founding fathers said,
- (ii) what sociologists do, and
- (iii) what logic demands from such a study?

Conclusion

Even when an institution becomes the subject-matter of newly-developed specialized discipline, they still remain the central problems of sociological investigations. For example, even though economics and politics are two distinct disciplines now, their interrelationship still remains the central problem of sociology. It may be said that those aspect of any social process or institution which connects it to others is its typical character as the interlocking 'system of action'. That is why sociology is often referred to as 'the study of the systems of social action and off their interactions.'

As Alex Inkeles mentions clearly in his book *What is Sociology?* (1965):

Sociology is not merely a collection of sub-disciplines on all realms of life, but rather is the study of those aspects of the social life which are present in all social forms.

Check Your Progress

3. Who for the first time tried to demarcate the subject matter of sociology?
4. What is the subject matter of history?

1.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Being influenced by Natural Sciences (like Physics and Mathematics), the subject-matter of sociology is claimed to have borrowed heavily from scientific methodologies of research. It is, therefore, considered a positive science.

2. The earliest sociologists like Auguste Comte, Kim and Max Weber, and others tried to establish their primary objective as the explanation and analysis of social phenomena and change leading to some conclusion on the basis of sociology's relationship with other social sciences.
3. Auguste Comte, for the first time, tried to demarcate the subject matter of sociology.
4. History considers the study of societies, cultures and civilizations as its subject matter.

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1.5 SUMMARY

- Since the beginning of human history, the observation, analysis and reflection of human-society have been topics of interest for thinkers and analysts.
- It was Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who, for the first time, introduced us to an independent, autonomous and systematic discipline for the study of societies and societal groups in which we live.
- The historical background of the origin of Sociology (as an independent and autonomous discipline) may be traced back to the time between 1750 to 1850.
- In their attempt to establish fixed and demarcating characteristic features of sociology (as an autonomous discipline), the earliest sociologists like Auguste Comte, Kim and Max Weber, and others tried to establish their primary objective as the explanation and analysis of social phenomena and change leading to some conclusion on the basis of sociology's relationship with other social sciences.
- In social statics, the primary concern of thinkers would be the major institutions working in and for the society, for example family, state, economy etc. The thinkers are supposed to understand the nature and interaction of these institutions in general.
- All of the important components of the society, for example, family, social class, ethnic group, racial group, rural and urban communities, social classes and even crime are the central problems for the study in the domain of sociology.
- Even when an institution becomes the subject-matter of newly-developed specialized discipline, they still remain the central problems of sociological investigations. For example, even though economics and politics are two distinct disciplines now, their interrelationship still remains the central problem of sociology.

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1.6 KEY WORDS

- **Positive Science:** It presents models of aspects of reality which are not true or false but are evaluated in term of their scope of applicability, accuracy and reliability. It emphasizes the application of formal analysis to empirical science. For example, Physics is considered a positive Science.
- **Social Institutions:** It consists of a group of people who have come together for a common purpose. These institutions are a part of the social order of society and they govern behaviour and expectations of individuals. For example, family, school, hospital and church are considered social institutions.
- **Social Relationships:** In social science, a social-relation (or social-interaction) is any relationship between two or more individuals. Social relations are derived from individual agency and form the basis of social structure and the basic object for analysis by social scientists.
- **Hybrid Character:** A hybrid character is a mixture of two different classes, taking some class features from each.
- **Synthetic Character:** The synthetic set of character attempts to establish relation between two or more variable features in relation.

1.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Is creating a definition for any academic discipline necessary? What are the benefits and drawbacks of a definition?
2. Discuss the hybrid character of sociology. How does it work in favour of the discipline?
3. What are the different approaches in the study of sociology?
4. List the characteristics features of sociology.

Long Answer Questions

1. Give an ideal definition of sociology. What is the nature and scope of sociology as an intellectual discipline?
2. What are the different approaches to study sociology? Which one would you prefer over others and why?
3. Give a detailed account of the development of sociology as a discipline.
4. Give an outlook of the central problems of sociology. Critically evaluate.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

*Overview of Sociological
Theory*

- Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
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UNIT 2 LEVELS OF THEORIZATION IN SOCIOLOGY

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Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Abstracted Empiricism vs Grand Theorization
 - 2.2.1 Reconciliation of Opposite Perspectives
 - 2.2.2 Different Levels of Theorization
- 2.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Words
- 2.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.7 Further Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In our previous discussion, we have tried to understand questions such as what was the etymological meaning of sociology, what were the different stages in its origin and development? As well as the central problems of sociology. Now, we shall try to understand how to analyze and investigate the central problems we have already demarcated in the discipline. A person new to the discipline would realize that there are several alternatives (with different chronological orders) and there is no unanimity even between sociologists in preferring one specific mode of theorization above others. There is still ambiguity about which mode of enquiry and theorization should be considered as the most appropriate one.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss some of the fundamental disagreements among sociologists regarding standard mode of enquiry and theorization
- Differentiate between abstracted empiricism and grand theorization
- Examine the different levels of theorization

2.2 ABSTRACTED EMPIRICISM VS GRAND THEORIZATION

The debate on the methodology and theorization in the discipline of sociology is not restricted only to the techniques involved, but also encompasses the fundamental

issues to be dealt with. There is a huge debate among sociologists on whether the method of theorization should be a 'controlled one' or a 'subjective one', to be 'fact-centric' or 'opinion-centric', to be 'value-neutral' or 'socio-politically engaged,' and so on. Whatever the decision taken, it would impose a huge impact on the future studies in the discipline.

The nature of social science is such that it expects a relatively higher degree of clarity, precision and measurement. In the words of Max Weber,

We can accomplish something which might never be attainable in the natural sciences... the subjective understanding of the action of the competent individuals.¹

Social science, therefore, expects some very sensitive instruments to dissect and discriminate between the two seemingly identical cases. In several other disciplines, the level of theorization seems much easier and fluid in nature- the mutual interaction between fact-findings and theory-formations is instant and intimate. While the empirical analysis pinpoints on the specific problems, the theory-formation establishes its significance. Every theory encompasses newer fact-findings, provides them value by incorporating them with previous theories and then in this way, paves the path for further empirical fact-findings.

However, such an ideal condition is rarely found in the discipline of sociology. The methodology of sociology does not function in the fashion it works in the positive sciences. The problem with this discipline is that, on one hand, most of theories are presented quite independently of the ongoing empirical research work, and on the other hand, the empirical fact-findings are connected to the theory-formation in a very restricted manner.

C.W. Mills, in an ironical way, has named the two opposite schools as 'abstracted empiricism' and 'the grand theorization'. According to Mills, while the theories of Paul Lazarsfeld are the ideal representation of abstract empiricism, theories of Talcott Parson represent the school of grand theory².

The above-mentioned distinctions are so rigid and influential in the field of sociology that it is almost impossible for a beginner to develop a workable orientation in the discipline without understanding the issues taken here.

This distinction can be understood much better in its historical context. As we all know, sociology, as a discipline, is nothing but an outgrowth of the age-old discipline of philosophy, especially social philosophy.³ It is quite obvious that it developed a natural inclination towards speculations, conceptualizations and

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¹ Theory of Social and economic organization.

² Grand Theory a term coined by the American sociologist C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* to refer to the form of highly abstract theorizing in which the formal organization and arrangement of concepts takes priority over understanding the social world.

³ Alex, Inkeles, *What is Sociology?* PHI, 1965.

analysis, rather than towards empirical and investigatory techniques. Apt examples in support of the above perspective can be traced in the thoughts of none-other-than Auguste Comte himself.

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Though Comte emphasized that he was trying to develop a schematic understanding of the society, its changes and factors responsible for it, he never seemed to make any serious attempt to test his theories empirically against the available empirical facts. The works of Herbert Spencer seemed to follow almost the same path.

It was on account of such a background that it was emphasized that ‘A growing distrust of mere hypothetical theory and *a priori* assumptions and the appearance of a general conviction that... principles are valid for application only in as much as they are legitimate induction from facts, accurately observed and methodically classified.’⁴

It was in reaction to the approach taken by classic sociologists that the newer generations attempted to present a more competing schema of social studies. Obviously, personal choices and preferences might have played a significant role in expanding this gap.

2.2.1 Reconciliation of Opposite Perspectives

However, on a further deeper analysis, it was realized that this seemingly contradictory relationship between fact-finding (empiricism) and theorization is more of a hypothetical and artificial kind, and not a real one. This distinction may easily be reconciled by considering these divisions as mere different levels of theorization in the discipline of sociology. In this way, it may be said that such a division would not hamper the growth of the discipline; rather it would work as a catalyst for establishing different levels of theorization if the subject is considered in its all-inclusiveness.

2.2.2 Different Levels of Theorization

In this context, it was Robert K. Merton who, for the first time, incorporated more than one distinct works under the title of *Theory*⁵:

1. Providing General Orientation
2. Constructing Social Concepts
3. Use of Empirical Generalizations
4. Elaborating Grand Theories
5. Developing a Theoretical Perspective

⁴ Journal of Statistical Society, London, 1838, Issue 1.

⁵ Merton, R.K., “The Bearing of Sociological Theories on Empirical Research”, Social Theory and Social Structure, Glencoe, 1957. P.86.

For the sake of clarity and precision, these topics shall be discussed one-by-one:

1. Providing General Orientation: At the very first step of initiating an inquiry on sociological issue, theorists provide a general outlook and understanding of the concerned issue. In other words, before starting any inquiry, a preliminary kind of theory-building is necessary for a smooth functioning of research, though it should be taken care of that this orientation should not create some undue advantage to certain variables (for example, a social scientist making an inquiry on a small group of population should generally be aware beforehand of the impact of size over social processes). Thus, the study of group-interaction in a small group may not exactly be in the same fashion as in the larger groups of population.

2. Constructing Sociological Concepts: The concepts in themselves are not sufficient enough to initiate a proper sociological research, but they are the necessary tools required in conducting any scientific inquiry. While the general orientation has already provided us the variables of research, the concepts endow us with the form and content of these selected variables. For example, Emile Durkheim not only talks about social-integration of a group but also describes various kinds of integrations and introduces the concept of *anomie* (normlessness). Parsons, on his research on different kinds of behaviour, also provides a set of concepts (such as pattern variables) in order to clearly explain the different ways in which social interactions takes place.

It is an agreeable fact that the concept formation is an integral part of any research but the problem lies in the fact that most of the thinkers consider concept formation as the endpoint of any research. This kind of research-practice has two significant drawbacks:

- (a) Though the concept has been formed, it has not been checked whether such a concept could actually be found existing and functioning in real word or not.
- (b) The theorists forget to add what can be empirically done with these concepts besides using them simply as the labels for certain things. In the prominent text *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (1961), George Homens says, 'Modern sociological theory... possess every virtue except that of explaining anything.' In this way, these concepts work like the categories or the pigeon holes in which a sociological theorist attempts to deliberately fit certain types of behaviour.

3. Use of Empirical Generalizations: The next step in any mode of inquiry is creating some empirical generalizations. These are simply the general propositions based on observed uniform relationship between different variables used in research. For example, in his book *Social Theory and Social Structure*, R.K. Merton cites one empirical generalization which says that 'labourers spend more money for food in comparison to the white

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collar people with the same income'. Merton is of the view that such empirical findings are found in abundance in most of the sociological texts.

The typical theorists tend to take a critical stance against this empirical trend. They are of the opinion that we might have a numerable facts but most of the times they contradict each-other. Most of the times the outcome of the research depends upon a variety of factors- some empirical, while others not. For example, the conditions, the sample and instruments used for research, etc. Moreover, the outcomes of different empirical researches should not be accumulated together to presume that they would provide us with the power to make predictions in the area. In fact, sociological researches have this uniqueness that the phenomena studied just now may have altered results when the same test is repeated for the second time. It was in this context that in his prominent text *Knowledge for What?* (Princeton, 1939), Robert Lynd said that 'Any research in the absence of an actively selected viewpoint becomes the ditty bag of any idiot.'

4. Elaborating Grand Theories: The next step in any results would be the formulation of a proper scientific and grand theory. This is what R.K. Merton describes as a statement of inference derivable from a theory. It needs to be noted here that while formation of a scientific law in a controlled environment like in laboratory is a quite easy and frequent, arriving at a sociological law is difficult as the society does not work like a controlled environment. Therefore, different sociological thinkers seem to have different opinions regarding this level of theorization.

In order to fully explain the functioning of this law, Durkheim's statement helps us. He states that the suicide rate in any specific group is always inversely proportional to the degree of integration and assimilation within that social group. Now, this statement functions properly as a scientific law and by knowing this one can predict which specific group will have a higher suicidal rate and which not. Therefore, it may be said as an example (as an outcome of the survey) that Catholics may have a lower suicide rate than the Protestants.

It is also an accepted fact that an ideal sociological research should consist of all the above mentioned steps/levels in the same chronological order. The order should consist of the following levels:

- (i) The researcher should start with the interrelated propositions for testing them.
- (ii) This will subsequently go to the revision of the theory on the basis of the fact-findings available, and then
- (iii) Finally, to the formulation of a new theory.

However, as we all know there is always a gap between the 'ideal' and the 'actual'. R.K. Merton says here that there are 'marked discontinuities' in these steps. In this way, it is expected that the relationship between theory and practice

should be well-synchronized and appreciated for conducting a successful research in sociology.

Some Observations

It has been a unanimous observation of many social researchers that the works presented by early sociological thinkers like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim were naturally inclined towards their total interests even in the condition of putting them in practice- the 'Protestant Ethics' and 'Suicide' may be considered as the most suitable instances of such a phenomenal prevalent in sociology.

In conclusion, it may be said that the relationship between the theory and applied research should be appreciated and the proper balance between the two aspects may bring some successful outcomes in the field of sociology. It is expected from the coming generations of researchers to put in practice what many of the conventional thinkers have understood only in theory.

It is commonly observed that many researchers in the field of sociology are prone to claim their competency as the doctors or experts of society. Auguste Comte attempted to employ knowledge derived from this newly developed field of sociology to construct a new perspective and vision for the society. For this, he presented an elaborate plan for a new religion of humanity accompanied by a proper scientific knowledge.

Emile Durkheim attempted to maintain a proper distinction between the discipline of sociology and various social doctrines (such as individualistic, communistic, socialistic etc.). Thinking on the lines of Auguste Comte, Durkheim was very cautious about holding any theory which does not have scientific neutrality and impartiality in it. Similarly, Wilfredo Pareto has also drawn our attention towards the risks involved in putting personal inclinations in the research work. In such a case the sociologist might stop talking about 'what is' and might slip into 'what ought to be'. It was because of these reasons that Max Weber insisted time-and-again that sociology should be a value-free discipline.

As we have discussed above, a majority of modern-day social thinkers have clearly established their inclination to work towards a value-free/ value-neutral social research. There are still some other thinkers who have a different kind of vision for the subject. For example, Robert Lynd out rightly rejected the notion of a disinterested sociology in his book *Knowledge for What?* Rather, he insisted on a socially or morally-engaged social science for having a better adaptation in different cultural contexts. He was the one who, for the first time, provoked social thinkers to come out of the relaxing charm of scientific objectivity and respond to the public expectations for guidance. In the same manner, C.W. Mills called sociology a discipline of 'reforming push'. There are several other thinkers who have gone against the conventional perspective and have demanded 'a more engaged kind of sociology'.

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Conclusion

Nowadays, we find that more-and-more social thinkers find themselves in an awkward situation where they are unable to resolve pervasive disagreements prevalent in the discipline of sociology- they believe as if their disagreements might reveal the immaturity of the discipline. Here, they have to understand that it is such disagreements that leads to the growth of the discipline. We have to realize that even scientists are still working on how an ideal inquiry should be conducted.⁶

In his remarkable statement about the ideal mode of inquiry, he said 'There are a variety of ways in which mastery of a subject of inquiry can be achieved, none of them has understandable superiority over the others, and each of them capable of Illuminating the world of things in a way not precisely duplicated by others.'⁷

Check Your Progress

1. What does the debate on the method and theorization in sociology encompass?
2. Why did Max Weber insist that sociology be a value free discipline?

2.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The debate on the methodology and theorization in the discipline of sociology is not restricted only to the techniques involved, but also encompasses the fundamental issues to be dealt with.
2. Wilfredo Pareto has also drawn our attention towards the risks involved in putting personal inclinations in the research work. In such a case the sociologist might stop talking about 'what is' and might slip into 'what ought to be'. It was because of such reasons that Max Weber insisted time-and-again that sociology should be a value-free discipline.

2.4 SUMMARY

- The debate on the methodology and theorization in the discipline of sociology is not restricted only to the techniques involved, but also encompasses the fundamental issues to be dealt with. There is a huge debate among sociologist on whether the method of theorization should be a 'controlled one' or a 'subjective one', to be 'fact-centric' or 'opinion-centric', to be 'value-neutral' or 'socio-politically engaged,' and so on.

⁶ Jose ph G Schwab, what do scientists do? Behavioral Science 1916 volume 1 page 27.

⁷ Ibid. p.23

- The methodology of sociology does not function in the fashion it works in the positive sciences. The problem with this discipline is that, on one hand, most of theories are presented quite independently of the ongoing empirical research work, and on the other hand, the empirical fact-findings are connected to the theory-formation in a very restricted manner. C.W. Mills, in an ironical way, has named the two opposite schools as ‘abstracted empiricism’ and ‘the Grand theorization’.
- This seemingly contradictory relationship between fact-finding (empiricism) and theorization is more of a hypothetical and artificial kind, and not a real one. This distinction may easily be reconciled by considering these divisions as mere different levels of theorization in the discipline of sociology.
- At the very first step of initiating an inquiry on sociological issue, theorists provide a general outlook and understanding of the concerned issue.
- It has been a unanimous observation of many social researchers that the works presented by early sociological thinkers like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim were naturally inclined towards their total interests even in the condition of putting them in practice
- In conclusion, it may be said that the relationship between the theory and applied research should be appreciated and the proper balance between the two aspects may bring some successful outcomes in the field of sociology.
- A majority of modern-day social thinkers have clearly established their inclination to work towards a value-free/ value-neutral social research.

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2.5 KEY WORDS

- **Empirical Generalization:** It is a set of logically consistent ideas about the relationships between empirical phenomena (i.e., concepts) that permits those ideas to be tested using observations.
- **Abstract Theorization:** It is a theory in which a system is described without specifying a structure.
- **Conceptualization:** It means the action or process of forming a concept or idea of something
- **General Orientation:** It is the introductory stage in the process of research enquiry, and an inevitable part of process in methodology.
- **Grand Theory:** It is a term coined by the American sociologist C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* to refer to the form of highly abstract theorizing in which the formal organization and arrangement of concepts takes priority over understanding the social world.

2.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short Answer Questions

1. Should sociology try to be a science? If so, is it possible to meet the standards of science as we understand them today?
2. Is it inevitable to arrive at a grand theory at the end of any sociological research? Can there be a research which does not result (or aspire to result) in theory-formation?

Long Answer Questions

1. What are the two opposite perspectives regarding methodology of sociology? Explain using suitable examples.
2. Distinguish between 'abstract empiricism' and 'grand theorization'. What should be their chronological order and why?
3. What are the different levels of theorization in the discipline of sociology? Give details.

2.7 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - II

Overview of Functionalism

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONALISM

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UNIT 3 OVERVIEW OF FUNCTIONALISM

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Origin and Development of Functionalism
- 3.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Words
- 3.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.7 Further Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The basis of the system of structural functionalism was laid during the economic crises of the 1930s. Alvin Gouldner, in *The Coming Crises of Western Sociology* (1970), argues that structural functionalism was developed as a response to the challenge of Marxism. Marxism was a general theory of society which condemned capitalism, whereas structural functionalism was to become a general theory of society which did not use capitalism to offer an explanation or condemn it to justify the various social phenomena. After World War II, came a period of comparative stability and economic expansion, but both the capitalism and its theory began to run into difficulties in the 1960s. However, there has been a major revival of interest among younger American sociologists in the US, and there is now a flourishing 'neofunctionalist' school in existence.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the development and origin of functionalism
- Examine the characteristics of social facts

3.2 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONALISM

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The first theoretical orientation in sociology was *functionalism*. It emerged as a sociological theory during the 1950s and early 1960s. Functional theory enquires how a certain phenomenon works to meet the survival requirement of a society while it is still evolving and adjusting to its environment. However, the presence of needs makes the working of this theory difficult as these needs bring about the existence of things.

- Herbert Spencer (1874–1896) stressed on the axes along which social systems differ.
- Emile Durkheim (1893) examined the new bases for integration of social systems undergoing differentiation. He provides a functional analysis while seeking to understand the function of social facts. The characteristics of social facts according to Durkheim are:
 - (i) **Exteriority:** Social facts are external to and independent of the individual members of the society. These develop as a result of collective living and their origins cannot be traced to organismic or psychic aspects of the individual consciousness. This is only due to the fact that every individual is a member of the group and acquires group characteristics through socialization.
 - (ii) **Generality:** Social facts are diffused throughout the group and are commonly shared by most of the members. These are not exclusive property of any individual; rather, they belong to the group as a whole.
 - (iii) **Constraint:** Durkheim maintains that constraint is a moral obligation to obey a rule. Constraint takes place when social facts exercise a coercive power over the individual members of the group by which they shape and regulate their behaviour. A significant focus is Durkheim's study of order which maintains that legal or social constraints are enforced when some social demands are defied. These constraints, when imposed on the individuals, influence their wants and tendencies. He assumes that society has certain functional prerequisites, the most important of which is the need for social order. Durkheim begins with the question of how a collection of individuals can be integrated to form an ordered society. The answer lies in forming a 'collective conscience' consisting of common belief and sentiments. Without this concurrence on basic moral issues, social bond would not be feasible and bringing individuals together cannot be possible. Without social accountability implemented through moral force, the harmony and mutual cooperation which is the foundation of social life would be lacking. To Durkheim, social facts should be studied in inter-

connectedness. And what holds the society together as an ongoing concern is the cohesiveness between these interdependent parts which is 'social solidarity'.

The American sociologist, Talcott Parsons' early contribution was based on the conviction that the appropriate subject matter of sociology is *social action*. This view reflected the strong influence of Max Weber and, to some extent, Thomas. In *The Structure of Social Action* Parsons presents an extremely complicated theory of social action in which it is held to be *voluntaristic behaviour*. The analysis is largely based on the means–end scheme. This complex formulation of theory of social action represented an ambitious but early effort by Parsons. This is interwoven with a detailed analysis of the theories of Weber, Durkheim, Pareto and Alfred Marshall. Parsons' voluntaristic theory of action emerged from two different traditions—the tradition of *positivistic utilitarianism* on the one hand and the tradition of *idealism* on the other.

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According to Parsons, every action involves an actor, a situation and the orientation of the actor to the situation and does not take place in isolation. According to him, the concept of action is derived from behaviour of human being as living organism. So social action is that behaviour by which man reacts to the external forces after understanding and interpreting them. This behaviour is motivated and directed by the meanings which the actor perceives in the external world, which he takes into account and to which he responds. So the essential feature of social action is the actor's sensitivity to the people and things about him, his perception of these and his reactions to the meanings they convey. Every behaviour becomes an action when it is oriented to attainment of ends or goals or occurs in situations. A behaviour also converts into an action when societal values and norms regulate it or there is energy, effort or motivation expended for achieving it. Parsons' functionalism stressed on certain requirements are developed an intricate category system around these requirements. A few of the elements of Parson's functionalism have been discussed in the following list:

- (i) **Adaptation:** Adaptation refers to the relationship between the system and its environment. It involves the problem of securing from the environment sufficient facilities and then distributing these facilities throughout the system. At a minimum, food and shelter must be provided to fulfil physical needs. The economy is the institution primarily concerned with this function.
- (ii) **Goal attainment:** Goal attainment involves the determination of goals and encouraging the members of the system to attain these goals; also mobilizing of the members for the achievements of these goals. Procedures for establishing goals and deciding on priorities between goals are institutionalized in the form of political system.
- (iii) **Integration:** Integration refers primarily to the adjustment of conflict. It deals with the difficulties in coordinating and maintaining feasible exchanges among system units. The law is the main institution which meets this need.

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Legal norms define and standardize relations between individuals and between institutions and so reduce the potential for conflict. When conflict does arise it is settled by the judicial system and does not lead to disintegration of the social system.

- (iv) **Latency:** It stores, organizes and maintains the motivational energy of elements in the social system. Its main functions are pattern maintenance and tension management within the system. Pattern maintenance refers to the maintenance of the basic pattern of values, institutionalized in the society. Institutions which perform this function include the family, the educational system and religion. Tension-management deals with the internal tensions and strains of actors in a social system.

Parsons' views on society in terms of its constituent sub-systems are: the physiological system, the personality system, the social (role) system and the cultural system. The link between individuals and society (or the social system) is fashioned through social roles. These are structured around social expectations about appropriate behaviour associated with different roles as well as 'pattern variables' which express wider 'dilemmas' of action. The survival and smooth running of the social system depends on its 'needs' being fulfilled. We will discuss Parsons and Merton's theory in detail later on in the book. We will also be discussing the other theorists of functionalism in subsequent units.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the first theoretical orientation in sociology?
2. What does integration refer to?

3.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The first theoretical orientation in sociology was functionalism.
2. Integration refers primarily to the adjustment of conflict. It deals with the difficulties in coordinating and maintaining feasible exchanges among system units.

3.4 SUMMARY

- The basis of the system of structural functionalism was laid during the economic crises of the 1930s.
- Alvin Gouldner, in *The Coming Crises of Western Sociology* (1970), argues that structural functionalism was developed as a response to the challenge of Marxism.

- The first theoretical orientation in sociology was functionalism. It emerged as a sociological theory during the 1950s and early 1960s.
- The American sociologist, Talcott Parsons' early contribution was based on the conviction that the appropriate subject matter of sociology is social action.
- According to Parsons, every action involves an actor, a situation and the orientation of the actor to the situation and does not take place in isolation.
- Parsons' views on society in terms of its constituent sub-systems are: the physiological system, the personality system, the social (role) system and the cultural system.
- The link between individuals and society (or the social system) is fashioned through social roles.

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3.5 KEY WORDS

- **Latency:** It refers to that which stores, organizes and maintains the motivational energy of elements in the social system.
- **Adaptation:** It refers to the relationship between the system and its environment.
- **Exteriority:** It means the quality or state of being exterior or exteriorized.

3.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. What does Durkheim mean by the term 'constraint'?
2. What is latency?

Long Answer Questions

1. Examine the origin and development of functionalism.
2. Describe the characteristics of social facts according to Durkheim.

3.7 FURTHER READINGS

- Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
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UNIT 4 ANALYTICAL FUNCTIONALISM

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Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Functional Theory of Stratification
- 4.3 Talcott Parsons: Structure of Social Action
- 4.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.8 Further Readings

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit discusses the functional theories of Talcott Parsons. The American sociologist Talcott Parsons is best known for his social action theory and structural functionalism. He is considered one of the most influential figures in twentieth century sociology. In fact, Parsons' social action theory was the first broad, systematic, and generalizable theory of social systems developed in the United States. Parson is also known for his translations of Weber's works, as well as his analysis of Durkheim and Vilfredo Pareto. We will first begin the unit with a general discussion on Davis and Moore's Structural-Functional Theory of Stratification.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the functional theory of stratification and its criticisms
- Discuss Parsons' action theory and theory of social systems

4.2 FUNCTIONAL THEORY OF STRATIFICATION

Structural-functional theory of stratification as articulated by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) is perhaps the best known single piece of work in the structural functional theory. Davis and Moore made it clear that they regarded social stratification as both universal and necessary. They argued that no society is ever unstratified or totally classless. Stratification is, in their view, a functional necessity. All societies need such a system and this need brings into existence a system of stratification. They also viewed a stratification system as a structure

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pointing out that stratification refers not to the individuals in the stratification system but also to a system of positions. They focused on how certain positions come to carry with them different degrees of prestige and not on how individuals came to occupy certain positions.

Given this focus, the major functional issue is how a society motivates and places people in their 'proper' positions in the stratification system. This is reducible to two problems. First, how does a society instil in the 'proper' individuals the desire to fill certain positions? Second, once people are in the right positions, how does society instil in them the desire to fulfil the requirements of those positions? The problem of proper social placement in society arises due to three basic reasons. First, some positions are more pleasant to occupy than others. Second, some positions are more important to the survival of society than others. Third, social positions require different abilities and talents.

Although these issues apply to all social positions, Davis and Moore were concerned with the functions of more important positions in society. The positions that rank high within the stratification system are presumed to be less in number but more important to the survival of society and those which require the greatest ability and talent. In addition, society must attach sufficient rewards to these positions so that many people will seek to occupy them and the individuals who do occupy them will work diligently. The converse was implied by Davis and Moore, but not discussed. That is, low ranking positions in the stratification system are presumed to be more pleasant and less important and require less ability and talent. Also, society has to be less vigilant about individuals that occupy these positions and perform their duties with diligence.

Davis and Moore did not argue that a society consciously develops a stratification system in order to be sure that the high-level positions are filled, and filled adequately. Rather they made it clear that stratification is an 'unconsciously evolved device'. However, it is a device that every society does, and must develop if it is to survive. According to Davis and Moore, in order to be sure that people occupy the higher-ranking positions, society must provide these individuals with various rewards, including great prestige, high salaries and sufficient leisure. For example, to ensure there are enough doctors in society, we need to offer them rewards. Davis and Moore implied that we could not expect people to undertake the 'burdensome' and 'expensive' process of medical education if we did not offer such rewards (high prestige and pay scale plus sufficient leisure). The implication seems to be that people at the top must receive the rewards that they deserve. If they do not, those positions would remain understaffed or unfilled, and the society would crumble.

Criticisms of Structural-Functional Theory of Stratification

Structural-Functional Theory of Stratification has been subject to much criticism since its publication in 1945. One basic criticism is that this theory of stratification simply perpetuates the privileged position of those people who already have power,

prestige and money. It does this by arguing that such people deserve their rewards, and indeed they need to be offered such rewards for the good of the society. The functional theory can also be criticized for assuming that simply because a stratified social structure has existed in the past it must continue to exist in the future as well. It is possible that future societies can be organized in any other non-stratified way. In addition, it has been argued that the idea of functional positions varying in their importance to society is difficult to support. For example, are garbage collectors really any less important to the survival of society than advertising executives? Despite the lower pay and prestige of the garbage collectors, they actually may be more important to the survival of the society. Nurses may be much more important to society than movie stars, but nurses have far less power, prestige and income than movie stars. The theory provides no explanation to such a situation.

Is there really a scarcity of people capable of filling high level positions? In fact, many people are prevented from the training they need to achieve prestigious positions, even though they have the ability. In the medical profession, for example, there is a persistent effort to limit the number of practicing doctors. In general, many able people never get a chance to show that they can handle high-ranking positions even though there is a clear need for them and their contributions. The fact is that those in high-ranking positions have a vested interest in keeping their numbers small and their power and income high. Finally, it can be argued that we do not have to offer people power, prestige and income to get them to want to occupy high level positions. People can be equally motivated by the satisfaction of doing a job well or by the opportunity to be of service to others.

Check Your Progress

1. What was the opinion of Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore on social stratification?
2. List one basic criticism of the structural-functional theory of stratification.

4.3 TALCOTT PARSONS: STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL ACTION

Talcott Parsons saw the social world in terms of people's ideas, particularly their norms and values. 'Norms' are the socially accepted rules which people employ in deciding on their actions. 'Values' can best be described as people's beliefs about what the world should be like, as they have to determine the effect on their actions. The most important social processes are seen as the communication of meanings, symbols and information for Parsons. He was concerned with the organization of individual actions into systems of actions, employing the holistic and individualistic approaches at the same time.

The idea of social life as a system—a network of different parts—explains the 'structural' part of the structural functionalist label that is usually attached to

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Parsons' work. The analogy with a biological system explains the 'functionalist' part. If we take the human body as a system, it can be seen as having certain needs, for example, food and a number of interrelated parts (the digestive system, the stomach, the intestines, etc.) which function to meet those needs. Parsons perceived the social system of action as comprising needs which had to be met in order to survive. The system was made up of a number of parts each having their own function. All living systems are seen as tending towards equilibrium, a stable and balanced relationship between the different parts, and maintaining themselves separately from other systems (a tendency to 'boundary maintenance').

Parsons emphasized on stability and order, and indeed he viewed social theory as attempting to answer the question 'how is social order possible?'—a problem often associated with the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who formulated it in its clearest form. Hobbes theory stated that in the 'natural state' human beings are entirely self-seeking, that they are at war among themselves, and this natural tendency has to be moulded and limited by social organizations.

Action Theory

Parsons' early contributions were based on the conviction that the appropriate subject matter of sociology is social action, a view reflecting the strong influence of Max Weber, and to some extent, Thomas Hobbes. In his work *The Structure of Social Action*, Parsons presents an extremely complicated theory of social action in which it is held to be *voluntaristic behaviour*. The analysis is largely based on the means-end scheme. Such a complex formulation of theory of social action representing an ambitious but early effort by Parsons is interwoven with a detailed analysis of the theories of Weber, Durkheim, Pareto and Alfred Marshall. Parsons' voluntaristic Theory of Action emerged from two different traditions—the tradition of *positivistic utilitarianism* on one hand, and the tradition of *idealism* on the other.

Parsons stated that action does not take place in isolation, rather, it entails an actor, a situation and orienting the actor to the situation. For Parsons, the idea of action is developed from the behaviour of human being as a living organism. Thus, Parson believed that man's reaction to external forces after interpreting and understanding them is called social action. It is motivated and directed by the meanings which the actor recognizes, takes into account and responds to in the external world. Any behaviour becomes action when:

- (i) It is oriented towards the accomplishment of objectives.
- (ii) It is controlled by rules and values of society.
- (iii) It occurs in situations.
- (iv) It entails the investment of energy or motivation or effort.

Parsons, while focusing on an actors' orientation, states that there are two constituents in orientation: motivational and value orientations.

For Parsons, *motivational orientation* which supplies energy to be spent in social action is threefold. It encompasses:

- (i) *Cognitive*: It corresponds to that which the actor perceives in a situation, in relation to his system of need-dispositions.
- (ii) *Cathectic*: Involves a process through which an actor invests an object with affective or emotional meaning.
- (iii) *Evaluative*: The means through which an actor distributes his energy to various interests among which he must choose.

On the other hand, *Value orientation*, points towards the observance of certain social rules or standards that are contrary to the needs which are central in motivational orientation. Like motivational orientation, there are three modes of value orientation:

- (i) The value orientation which deals with the validity of judgment or *cognitive orientation*.
- (ii) Orientation which helps actors judge whether the response to the surrounding objects are appropriate or consistent, and is known as '*appreciative orientation*'.
- (iii) The orientation that helps an actor commit to his objects is known as '*moral orientation*'.

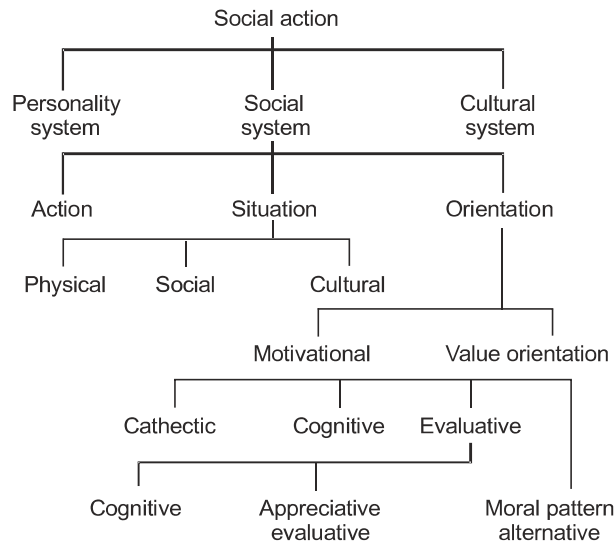


Fig. 4.1 Parsons' Analysis of Social Action

The social system, the personality system, and the cultural system, which are the three analytical systems are all based on Parson's schemes. Thus, motivational and value orientations define the aspects of role expectations like behaviour and culture.

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Theory of Social Systems**NOTES**

The social system is closely related to Parsons' earlier work, *The Structure of Social Action*. Here, the focus is on an empirical generalization or methodology. Drawing from Max Weber's typological approach, Parsons views actors as oriented to situations in terms of motives. The social system is an attempt to bring together the main outlines of a conceptual scheme for the analysis of structure and processes of social system in a systematic and generalized form.

Parsons conceives of an actor who acts in terms of means and conditions and this actor has an object towards the act. He maintained that individuals interact in conditions where the process becomes easy to investigate in a scientific sense. Then it is analysed using the same techniques that other sciences use to carry out their investigations. Parsons' notion of social system varies with different places. According to Parsons, a social system is defined as a plurality of individual actors interacting with one another; it is a plurality of individuals who are motivated by a tendency to optimize gratification.

Individuals also have relation to this situation that is defined in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared patterns. There are three types of motives. These are:

- *Cognitive*
- *Cathetic*
- *Evaluative*

There are three corresponding types of values:

- *Cognitive*
- *Appreciative*
- *Moral*

These modes of orientation create a composite type of action such as:

- (a) **Instrumental:** These are actions oriented to realize explicit goals efficiently.
- (b) **Expressive:** In this type of orientation, action is directed at realizing emotional satisfaction.
- (c) **Moral:** This type of orientation deals with actions concerned with realizing standards of right and wrong. Thus, the unit acts involve motivational and value orientation and have a general direction as a consequence of which combination of values and motives prevails for an actor.

According to Parsons, as variously oriented actors interact (in terms of their configuration of motivational and value orientation), they come to develop agreements and sustain patterns of interaction which became standards. Such standard patterns can be looked at as a social system. Actions may be composed of three 'interpenetrating action system'—the *cultural*, the *social* and the

personality. Following both Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown's lead, Parsons viewed integration within and among the action system as a basic requisite for survival.

Parsons was concerned with the integration within the social system itself and between social system and cultural patterns on the one hand, and between the social system and the personality system on the other. For such integration to occur, at least two functional requisites had to be met:

- (i) A social system must have a sufficient proportion of its component actor adequately motivated to act in accordance with the requirements of its role system.
- (ii) A social system must avoid commitment to cultural patterns that either fail to define a minimum of order or that places impossible demands on people, and thereby generate deviance and conflict.

Parsons was mainly concerned with cultural systems insofar as they affected social systems and personality. Thus, according to him, a social system is a mode of organization of *action elements* relative to the persistence or ordered processes of change of the interactive patterns of a plurality of individual actors. First, act is mentioned as a unit of social system. This act becomes a unit insofar as it becomes a process of interaction between its author and another actor. Secondly, for more macroscopic analysis of the social system, a higher order unit than an act, called the *status-role* is used.

Parsons maintained that all actors are involved in a number of interactions with other actors in a social system, giving rise to a complementary style of functioning. Thus, this participation of an actor in multiple relationships with systematic patterns makes up an important unit of social system. This participation, in turn, has two principal aspects. On one hand, there is a *positional aspect*, i.e., where the actor is located in the social system which is called his *status*; on the other hand, there is a processual aspect, i.e., what the actor does in his relations with others seen in context of functional significance for the social system. This is called his *role*. The status role bundles are not, in general, attributes of the actors, but are units of the social system. An actor himself is considered as a unit of the social system as he holds a status or performs a role. So there are three different units of the social system. These are:

- (i) The social act, performed by an actor and oriented to one or more actors on objects.
- (ii) The actor's status-role.
- (iii) The actor himself as a social unit.

According to Parsons, AGIL is a function that is 'a complex of activities directed towards meeting a need or needs of the system'. Using this definition, Parsons believed that there are four functional imperatives necessary for (characteristic of) all systems.

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Parsons designed the AGIL scheme to be used at all levels in his theoretical system. We will illustrate how Parsons uses AGIL in the discussion below on the four action systems.

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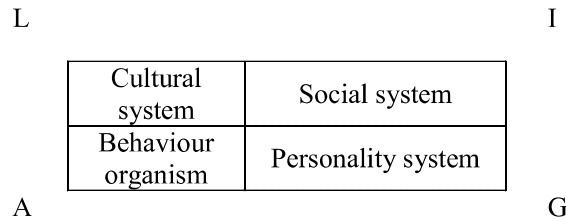


Fig. 4.2 Structure of the General Action System

The action system that handles the adaption function by both adjusting the external world and transforming it is called the *biological organism*. The *personality system* defines system objectives and mobilizes resources to attain those objectives thus performing the objective attainment function. The *social system* copes with the integration function by controlling its constituent parts. Finally, the *cultural system* provides actors with the rules and values that motivate them for action and thus performing the latency function. Figure 4.2 summarizes the structure of the action system in terms of the AGIL schema.

According to Parsons, the functional prerequisites of social systems are as follows:

- **Adaptation:** This prerequisite refers to the relationship between the system and its environment and entails the dilemma of securing from the environment sufficient facilities and then allocating these facilities throughout the system. The economy is the institution principally concerned with this function.
- **Goal attainment:** This prerequisite entails the determination of objectives and motivating the members of the system to attain these objectives. The prerequisite also helps in deploying members and using their energies for the achievement of these objectives. The political system helps standardize the procedures for establishing objectives and deciding on the main concern between objectives.
- **Integration:** Integration refers primarily to the adjustment of conflict and designates the dilemma of organizing and maintaining viable interrelations among system units. This need is primarily met by the institution of the law. The possibility of conflict is reduced through legal norms that define and standardize relations between individuals and between institutions. When a conflict does take place it is resolved by the judicial system and thus it does not disrupt the social system.
- **Latency:** This prerequisite helps in managing tensions and maintaining social patterns within a social system. Latency also helps in organising, storing and maintaining motivational energies of various constituents present within such a system. Pattern maintenance refers to the maintenance of the basic

pattern of values standardized by a particular society. This function is performed by institutions such as the family, religion, education system, etc. The dilemma of the internal tensions of actors in a social system is dealt through tension-management.

Thus, the development of the four functional prerequisites has been abbreviated as AGIL (indicates **A**daptation, **G**oal attainment, **I**ntegration, **L**atency). AGIL denotes a shift away from the analysis of structures to the analysis of functions. Parsons claims that a constant overlapping takes place between these functional prerequisites. This inter-penetration of one into the other is the hallmark of Parsons' social system. Due to these changes society is said to be in a *moving equilibrium*.

Parsons' action system

The heart of Parsons' work is found in his four action systems. In the assumptions that Parsons made regarding his action systems, we encounter the problem of order that was his overwhelming concern and that has become a major source of criticism of his work (Schwanenberg, 1971). The Hobbesian problem of order—what prevents a social war of all against all—was not answered to Parsons' satisfaction by the earlier philosophers. Parsons found his answer to the problem of order in structural functionalism, which according to him operated under the following set of assumptions:

- (a) Systems tend toward self-maintenance of order or balance.
- (b) Systems have the property of order and interdependence of parts.
- (c) The system may be static or may be entailed in an ordered process of transformation.
- (d) The nature of one part of the system has an impact on the form that the other parts could take.
- (e) Systems maintain boundaries with their environments.
- (f) The two primary processes necessary for a given state of balance of a system are allocation and integration.
- (g) Systems are inclined towards self-maintenance which entails the maintenance of boundaries and of the relationships of parts of the whole, the management of environmental variations, and the control of the propensity to transform the system from within.

These assumption led Parsons to make the analysis of the ordered structure of society his first priority.

Parsons' social systems

Parsons' conception of the social system begins at the micro level with an interface between the ego and the alter ego, defined as the most elementary type of the social system. Although Parsons spent very little time analysing this level, he did state that the characteristics of this interface system are present in the more complex

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forms taken by the social systems. According to Parsons a social system is, “A social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical and environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the ‘Optimization of Gratification’ and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols.”

This definition seeks to define a social system in terms of many of the key concepts in Parsons’ work—actors, interaction, environment, optimization of gratification, and culture.

Despite his commitment to viewing the social system as a system of interaction, Parsons did not use interaction as his fundamental unit in the study of the social system. This is neither an aspect of actors nor an aspect of interaction, but rather a structural component of the social system. **Status** refers to a structural position within the social system, while role is how the actor behaves in a position, seen in the context of its functional significance for the larger system. The actor is viewed not in terms of thoughts and actions but (at least in terms of position in the social system) as nothing more than a bundle of various status and roles.

In his analysis of the social system, Parsons was interested primarily in its structural components. In addition to a concern with the status-role, Parsons was interested in the large-scale components of social systems, as collectives, norms and values. In his analysis of the social system, however, Parsons was not simply a structuralist but also a functionalist. He, thus, delineated a number of functional prerequisites of a social system. First, social systems must be structured so that they operate comparatively with other systems. Secondly, the system must meet a significant proportion of the needs of its actors. Thirdly, the system must elicit adequate participation from its members. Fourthly, it must have at least a minimum of control over potentially disruptive behaviour. Sixthly, if conflict becomes sufficiently disruptive, it must be controlled. Finally, a social system requires a language in order to survive.

However, Parsons did not completely ignore the issue of the relationship between actors and social structures in his discussion of the social system. In fact, he called the integration of value patterns and need-dispositions ‘the fundamental dynamic theorem of sociology’. In a successful socialization process, the norms and values are internalized, i.e., they became part of the actors’ ‘conscience’. As a result, in pursuing their own interests, the actors are, in fact, serving the interests of the system as a whole. Parsons stated, ‘the combination of value-orientation patterns which is acquired (by the actor in socialization) must in a very important degree be a function of the fundamental role structure and dominant values of the social system’.

As a structural functionalist, Parsons distinguished among four structures, or sub-systems in society in terms of the functions (AGIL) they perform (Fig. 4.3). The economy is the sub-system that performs the function for society of

adapting to the environment through labour, production and allocation. Through such work, the economy adapts the environment to society's needs and it helps society adapt to these external realities. The polity or political system performs the function of goal attainment by pursuing societal objectives and mobilizing actors and resources to that end. The fiduciary system (for example, school and family), handles the latency function by transmitting culture (norms and values) to actors and allowing it to be internalized by them. Finally, the integration function is performed by the societal community (for example, the law), which coordinates the various components of society.

Fiduciary System	Societal Community
Economy	Polity

Fig. 4.3 Functional Imperative: Society and its Sub-Systems

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Cultural system

For Parsons, culture was the major force that bound the diverse elements of the social world, or to use his words, the action system. In the social system, culture is embodied in norms and values, while it is internalized by the actor in the personality system. However, for Parson, the cultural system is not simply a part of other systems; it also has a separate existence in the form of the social stock of knowledge, symbols and ideas. These aspects of the cultural system are available to the social and personality systems, but they do not become part of them (Parsons and Shills, 1951).

Parsons defined the cultural system, as he did his other systems, in terms of its relationship to the other action systems. Thus, culture is seen as a patterned, ordered system of symbols that are objects of orientation to actors, internalized aspects of the personality system, and institutionalized patterns in the social system. Because it is largely symbolic and subjective, culture is readily transmitted from one system to another. This allows it to move from one social system to another through diffusion and from one personality system to another through learning and socialization. However, the symbolic/subjective character of culture gives it another characteristic—the ability to control Parsons' other action systems. This is one of the reasons that Parsons came to view himself as a 'cultural determinist'.

Personality system

The personality system is controlled not only by the cultural system, but also by the social system. That is not to say that Parsons did not accord some independence to the personality system.

Parsons stated that personality is the organized system of orientation and motivation of action of the individual actor. The basic component of personality is the 'need-disposition'. Parsons and Shills defined need-disposition as the most significant units of motivation of action. They differentiated need-disposition from

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drives, which are innate tendencies, 'physiological energy that makes action possible'. To put it another way, drives are better seen as part of the biological organism. Need-dispositions are then defined as, 'these same tendencies when they are not innate but acquired through the process of action itself'. In other words, need-dispositions are drives that are shaped by the social setting.

Need-dispositions impel actors to accept or reject objects presented in the environment or to seek out new objects if the ones that are available do not adequately satisfy need-dispositions. Parsons differentiated among three basic types of need-dispositions. The first type impels to seek love, approval, and so forth, from their social relationships. The second type includes internalized values that lead actors to observe various cultural standards. Finally, there are the role expectations that lead actors to give and get appropriate responses.

Behavioural organism

Though he included the behavioural organism as one of the four action systems, Parsons had very little to say about it. It was included because it is the source of energy for the rest of the systems. Although based on genetic constitution, its organization is affected by the processes of conditioning and learning that occur during the individual's life. The biological organism is clearly a residual system in Parsons' work, but at the minimum, Parsons is to be lauded for including it as a part of his sociology, if for no other reason than that he anticipated the interest in socio-biology by some sociologists.

Check Your Progress

3. When does behaviour become action?
4. Where does Parsons' conception of the social system?

4.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Davis and Moore made it clear that they regarded social stratification as both universal and necessary.
2. One basic criticism of the structural-functional theory of stratification is that this theory of stratification simply perpetuates the privileged position of those people who already have power, prestige and money.
3. Any behaviour becomes action when:
 - (i) It is oriented towards the accomplishment of objectives.
 - (ii) It is controlled by rules and values of society.
 - (iii) It occurs in situations.
 - (iv) It entails the investment of energy or motivation or effort.

4. Parsons' conception of the social system begins at the micro level with an interface between the ego and the alter ego, defined as the most elementary type of the social system.

4.5 SUMMARY

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- Structural-functional theory of stratification as articulated by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) is perhaps the best known single piece of work in the structural functional theory.
- The major functional issue is how a society motivates and places people in their 'proper' positions in the stratification system.
- Structural-Functional Theory of Stratification has been subject to much criticism since its publication in 1945.
- One basic criticism is that this theory of stratification simply perpetuates the privileged position of those people who already have power, prestige and money.
- Talcott Parsons saw the social world in terms of people's ideas, particularly their norms and values.
- The most important social processes are seen as the communication of meanings, symbols and information for Parsons.
- Parsons' early contributions were based on the conviction that the appropriate subject matter of sociology is social action, a view reflecting the strong influence of Max Weber, and to some extent, Thomas Hobbes.
- The social system is closely related to Parsons' earlier work, *The Structure of Social Action*. Here, the focus is on an empirical generalization or methodology.
- Despite his commitment to viewing the social system as a system of interaction, Parsons did not use interaction as his fundamental unit in the study of the social system. This is neither an aspect of actors nor an aspect of interaction, but rather a structural component of the social system.

4.6 KEY WORDS

- **Norms:** They are the socially accepted rules which people employ in deciding on their actions.
- **Values:** They can best be described as people's beliefs about what the world should be like, as they have to determine the effect on their actions.
- **Culture:** It means the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

- **Symbol:** It refers to a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.

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4.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Give an account of Talcott Parsons 'Action Theory'.
2. Write a short-note on Parsons' idea of social life as a system.
3. What does motivational orientation encompass?

Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the structural-functional theory of stratification as articulated by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore.
2. Examine the criticisms of structural-functional theory.
3. Elaborate on the four action systems in Parsons' AGIL scheme.

4.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
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UNIT 5 SOCIAL SYSTEM

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Functional Prerequisites of a Society
- 5.3 Pattern Variables
- 5.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.5 Summary
- 5.6 Key Words
- 5.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.8 Further Readings

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5.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we discussed Talcott Parsons' action theory and theory of social system. In this unit, the discussion on the theories of Parson will continue. As you learnt previously, Parsons attempted to develop and perfect a general analytic model suitable for analysing all types of collectivities. Unlike the Marxists, who focused on the occurrence of radical change, Parsons explored why societies were stable and functioning. His AGIL model represented the four basic functions that all social systems must perform if they are to persist. It was one of the first open systems theories of organizations. Here, we will discuss the functional prerequisites of a society and Parsons' pattern variables.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Parsons' pattern variables
- Examine the different functional prerequisites of society

5.2 FUNCTIONAL PREREQUISITES OF A SOCIETY

One of the major concerns of a structural functionalist is an analysis of the things—the structures and particularly the functions—that a social system needs in order to survive. Aberle and his colleagues discussed the basic conditions that would cause the termination of society, if these conditions ceased to exist. The first factor deals with the population characteristics of the society. The extinction or the dispersion of its population would clearly threaten the existence of a society. This would occur if society lost enough of its population to make its various structures inoperative. Second, an apathetic population would be a threat to society. Although

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this is a question of degree, because some segments of a society always manifest at least some apathy. At some point, the population could become so apathetic that various components of society would cease to operate and ultimately the entire society would disintegrate. Thirdly, a war of all against all within the population would threaten society's existence. A high level of internal conflict within society would require the intervention of various social control agents who would use force to contain the conflict. Structural functionalists believe that a society cannot operate for any length of time on the basis of force. As Aberle and his colleagues put it, 'a society based solely on force is a contradiction in terms'. According to structural functionalists, society is held together by the consensus of its members; to them a society held together by force is no society at all. Finally, a society could be terminated by absorption into another society through annexation, conquest and so forth.

The reverse side of this discussion of functional prerequisites includes the characteristics that a society must have in order to survive. For one thing, a society must have an adequate method of dealing with its environment. Of the two aspects of the environment that can be differentiated, the first is the ecology. A society must be able to extract from the environment what it needs to survive (food, fuel, raw materials and so forth) without destroying the sources. The second aspect of the environment is the other social systems with which a society must be able to cope. This involves among other things trade, cultural exchanges, adequate communications and adequate military defence in the event of inter-societal hostilities.

A society must also have an adequate method for sexual recruitment. Heterosexual relationships have to be patterned in such a way that men and women have adequate opportunities to interact. In addition, both sexes must be endowed with the motivation needed for a rate of reproduction sufficient to maintain the society. Furthermore, the society needs to be sure that there are a sufficient number of people and that they have diverse enough interests and skills to allow the society to function. A society must also have sufficient differentiation of roles, as well as a way of assigning people to those roles. In all societies, certain activities must be performed and roles must be constructed so that they can be performed. The most important form of role differentiation is social stratification. As we have seen, one of the basic tenets of structural functionalism is that societies must be stratified to survive. Stratification is seen as performing various functions, such as ensuring that people are willing to take on the responsibilities of high status positions, ensuring the stability of the social system, and so forth.

An adequate communication system is also viewed as a functional requirement of any social system. Its elements include language and channels of communication. Clearly, society itself would be impossible if people were not able to interact and communicate. However, when structural functionalists discuss society's communication system, they also mean the shared symbolic systems that

people learn during the socialization process and that make communication possible. Shared symbolic systems make possible a cultural value system. It is the cultural system that is crucial to the structural-functional view on society, and how it is held together. The common value pattern is a bulwark against the possibility of continual conflict within the society.

Not only must there be a shared cultural system, but structural functionalists also talk about the need for a shared system of values at the individual level. People must look at the world in essentially the same way. This allows them to predict, with a high degree of accuracy, what others will think and do. These mutual cognitive orientations perform various functions. Of perhaps the greatest importance is that they make social situations stable, meaningful and predictable. In short, a stable society which is of enormous importance to structural functionalists is made possible by the fact that actors operate with shared orientations. Such shared orientations also allow people to account in similar ways for those things they cannot control or predict, they enable them to sustain their involvement in and commitment to social situations.

Structural functionalists also argue that society needs a shared and articulated set of goals. If people were pursuing many unrelated goals, the resulting chaos would make society impossible. Shared goals such as marital happiness, the success of children, and occupational achievement help to give a high level of cohesion to a society. A society requires some method of regulating the means to achieve these goals, and the normative system performs this functions. Without normative regulations, society would be afflicted by chaos, anomie and apathy. If occupational success could be obtained by any means possible, there would be societal disorder according to the structural functionalists.

A society requires the socialization of new members in order to survive; this implies that they need to learn and know many things, including their place in the stratification system, the common value system, shared cognitive orientations, acceptable goals, norms defining proper means to these goals and regulations on affective states. If actors have not learned and internalized such things, the society is viewed as impossible by the structural functionalists. Finally, society requires effective control over disruptive forms of behaviour. Ideally, if the socialization process has led actors to internalize all the proper values, then they conform of their volition. To the structural functionalists, a society runs best when there is no need for external control of actors. However, when external control proves necessary, various social control agents are brought in picture.

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Check Your Progress

1. List one major concern of the structural functionalist.
2. Why does a society require the socialization of new members?

5.3 PATTERN VARIABLES

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Pattern variables first emerged as a conceptual scheme for classifying types of roles in social systems starting with the distinction between professional and business roles. Later, the scheme was revised and its relevance extended from role analysis in the social system to the analysis of all types of systems of action. As Parsons states, 'The pattern variable scheme defines a set of fine dichotomies. Any course of action by an actor involves a pattern of choices with respect to these five sets of alternatives' and again, 'a pattern variable is a dichotomy, one side of which must be chosen by an actor before he can act with respect to that situation.'

So, these five pattern variables derive directly from the frame of reference of Theory of Action, and that in the sense that they are all thus derived, they constitute a system. With the help of pattern variables, one can categorize the orientation of personality types, values in cultures and standard models of the social structure. The pattern variables are:

- (i) **Affectivity–affective neutrality:** This concerns with the amount of emotion or effect that is appropriate in a given interaction situation.
- (ii) **Self orientation–collective orientation:** Every action has a reason and a direction. The level or extent till which an action may be directed towards realizing individual or group goals is the self-orientation and collective orientation.
- (iii) **Universalism–particularism:** This orientation points to the problem of whether evaluation and judgment of others in an interaction situation is to apply to all actors or whether all actors be assessed in terms of the same standards.
- (iv) **Ascription–achievement:** This particular orientation deals with the issue of how to assess an actor, whether in terms of performance or on the basis of inborn qualities, such as sex, age, race and family status. So, basically this orientation debates whether an actor should assess another actor on the basis of his performance, or on the attributes and qualities he has.
- (v) **Specificity–diffuseness:** This orientation denotes the issues of how far reaching obligation in an interaction situation should be. Should the obligations be narrow and specific, or should they be extensive and diffused?

Thus, the pattern variables, apart from being dilemmas of choice that every actor confronts are also characteristics of value standards and a scheme for the formulation of value standards. These pattern variables are also categories for description of value orientations, crucial components in the definition of role expectations, characterizations of differences of empirical structure of personalities or social systems. These are inherent patterns of cultural value orientation. A pattern variable in its cultural aspect is a normative pattern; in its personality aspect, a need, a disposition; and in its social system aspect a role expectation.

Explaining the relationship between pattern variables, Parsons is of the opinion that the first three derive from the problems of primacy among the modes of orientation; the last two from indeterminate object situation. Parsons considers pattern variables to describe all kinds of social relationships. Business relationships and family relationships are, for example, polar opposites, differing in each set of variables.

Business relationships are characterized by affective neutrality, specificity, universalism, performance-orientation and self-orientation. Family relationships are characterized by affectivity, diffuseness, particularism, quality and collective orientation.

Check Your Progress

3. How did pattern variables first emerge?
4. How does Parsons' define a pattern variable?

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5.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. One of the major concerns of a structural functionalist is an analysis of the things—the structures and particularly the functions—that a social system needs in order to survive.
2. A society requires the socialization of new members in order to survive; this implies that they need to learn and know many things, including their place in the stratification system, the common value system, shared cognitive orientations, acceptable goals, norms defining proper means to these goals and regulations on affective states.
3. Pattern variables first emerged as a conceptual scheme for classifying types of roles in social systems starting with the distinction between professional and business roles.
4. According to Parsons', a pattern variable is a dichotomy, one side of which must be chosen by an actor before he can act with respect to that situation.

5.5 SUMMARY

- One of the major concerns of a structural functionalist is an analysis of the things—the structures and particularly the functions—that a social system needs in order to survive.
- Aberle and his colleagues discussed the basic conditions that would cause the termination of society, if these conditions ceased to exist.

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- The reverse side of this discussion of functional prerequisites includes the characteristics that a society must have in order to survive. For one thing, a society must have an adequate method of dealing with its environment.
- Not only must there be a shared cultural system, but structural functionalists also talk about the need for a shared system of values at the individual level.
- Pattern variables first emerged as a conceptual scheme for classifying types of roles in social systems starting with the distinction between professional and business roles.
- Parsons states, 'The pattern variable scheme defines a set of fine dichotomies. Any course of action by an actor involves a pattern of choices with respect to these five sets of alternatives.'
- The five pattern variables derive directly from the frame of reference of Theory of Action, and that in the sense that they are all thus derived, they constitute a system.
- Explaining the relationship between pattern variables, Parsons is of the opinion that the first three derive from the problems of primacy among the modes of orientation; the last two from indeterminate object situation.

5.6 KEY WORDS

- **Ecology:** It is the study of the relationships between plants, animals, people, and their environment, and the balances between these relationships.
- **Pattern Variables:** They are five dichotomies, developed by Talcott Parsons, to draw out the contrasting values to which individuals orient themselves in social interaction.
- **Bulwark:** It means something that protects you from dangerous or unpleasant situations

5.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. According to Aberle, what are the basic conditions that would cause the termination of society if these conditions cease to exist?
2. What are the characteristics that a society must have in order to survive?

Long Answer Questions

1. Examine the different functional pre-requisites of society.
2. Describe Parsons' five pattern variables.

5.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.
- Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
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UNIT 6 EMPIRICAL FUNCTIONALISM

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Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Robert K. Merton: Theory of Social Structure
- 6.3 Major Criticism of Structural Functionalism
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

6.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about the functional pre-requisites of society as well as Parsons' concept of pattern variables. Here, we will critically analyse the theories of social structure, role-set, reference group, anomie and paradigm of functional analysis as introduced by Robert K. Merton, one of the foremost theorists of empirical functionalism.

Robert. K. Merton was an American sociologist best known for developing concepts such as 'unintended consequences', the 'reference group', and 'role strain'. Merton is best known for the concept of role model and self-fulfilling prophecy. According to Merton, 'The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour, which makes the originally false conception come true.'

6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Merton's theory of social structure and theory of anomie
- Examine the substantive, methodological and logical criticisms of structural functionalism

6.2 ROBERT K. MERTON: THEORY OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Robert K. Merton is thought of as a functional analyst concerned with sociological understanding produced by research of objective, latent patterns inherent in social

life. Merton, being a central figure in the theoretical development of American sociology, was influenced both by Parsons and Sorokin, though Parson's impact was more pronounced in his works. However, while Merton held a broadly functional perspective, his path began to diverge from that of Parsons as he refined the method of functional analysis. He rejected Parsons' ideology of developing an inclusive kind of theory and embraced the middle path of analysing a limited set of practical phenomena. He argued that in view of the general status of sociological knowledge and theory, Parsons' enterprises was over ambitious.

For Merton, such grand theoretical schemes are premature, since the theoretical and empirical groundwork necessary for their completion have not been performed. He emphasized on the need to examine dysfunctional social systems along with functional ones, thereby negating the rigid outlook of former functional theories. In relation to this, Merton propounded new paradigms and a protocol for introducing a fresh approach to traditional functional theories. He also debated Malinowski's theory that a social function was required for all social phenomena. According to Merton, sociology in the present state of its development required theories of middle range. Such theories should be grounded in empirical data, and at the same time should use concepts which are clearly defined and practical.

Theory of Social Structure and Paradigm of Functional Analysis

Merton identifies the central orientation of functionalism as the practice of interpreting data by establishing their consequences for larger structures in which they are implicated. Functional analysis involves the search for functions. His functional orientation is a shift from a static towards a dynamic image of society. Merton's functionalism is very different from the classical functionalism of Comte and Spencer's sociology, Brown's cultural anthropology and from Parson's functional structuralism. Merton saw functional theorizing as embracing three basic postulates which are:

- (i) **Functional unity of society:** The assumption in this postulate is that an entire social and cultural system uses a typical social activity. However, this holds true only when we take a uniform, homogeneous system with perfectly integrated elements. The practical entity of integration varies with different types of systems and even within the same systems it keeps changing from time to time. So, it is questionable that all human societies must have some degree of integration. Merton, however, views that the degree of integration is an issue to be empirically determined; so the degree to which functional unity exists in the social system is a matter subject to empirical investigation.
- (ii) **Universal functionalism:** This postulate holds that all social and cultural items fulfil sociological functions. This assumption implies an image of society in which there are no dispensable or irrelevant elements. For Merton, if examination of an actually existing system is undertaken, it would be clear that there is a wide range of empirical possibilities.

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(iii) **Functional indispensability:** Merton focuses on the alleged indispensability of particular cultural or social forms for fulfilling a particular function in a social system. Therefore, according to Merton, all parts are functional, i.e., the existence of all parts is essential for the survival of the social system. Hence, all parts are functionally indispensable. Merton contends that such conclusions, which have been taken for granted by various functionalists are not required as can be seen from practical evidence. He proposes an alternative assumption which he considers a basic theorem of functional analysis. According to him, just as the same item may have multiple functions, similarly, the same function can be diversely fulfilled by alternative items. So, Merton postulated the importance of functional analysis as a concern with various types of functional alternatives or functional equivalents within the social system.

Middle-Range Theory

Merton developed the notion of middle-range theory as the theoretical goal suitable for the contemporary epoch of sociology. He conceives of sociological theory as logically interconnected sets of propositions from which empirical uniformities can be derived. To Merton, the theories of middle range are 'theories that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organization and social change'. These are used primarily to guide empirical inquiry. Examples of middle-range theories are Theory of Reference Groups, Theory of Relative Deprivation, and Merton's Theory of Role-Set. These theories are quite different from those all-embracing total systems of sociological theory. Merton rallies to his cause an impressive array of figures in the history of thought, including Plato, Bacon and Mill, and such sociologists as Hankins, Ginsberg, Mannheim and Sorokin who favoured the theories of middle-range.

However, in middle-range theory, there is summary and retrospect, an attempt to codify sociological theory, questioning of literary style in sociological writing, and a treatment of the function of paradigms in the development of science.

Manifest and Latent Functions

Like Parsons, Merton replaced structural functionalism with functional analysis and brought functional analysis to the fore, and raised it to the level of theoretical orthodoxy. At the same time, he helped to bring about the demise of its canonical form, introducing a radically new and modified formula of functional analysis. Merton maintains that the assumptions of functional theory holds that social activities are common for an entire social system; that these social and cultural functions completes all sociological function; and that these functions cannot be done away with.

While considering the first postulate, Merton faults Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore for overestimating the integrative function of religion in society. He also criticized them for ignoring the divisive effects that religion has had in the actual history of human societies. This error is attributed to the practice of carrying over, without modification, theories and conceptions derived from the study of non-literate societies. Thirdly, Merton suggests that the notion of functional indispensability of items be avoided in view of the number of functional alternatives that can be discerned in societies. According to Merton, sociologists often confuse conscious motivations and objective consequences of behaviour. In this context, he brings out the distinctions between *manifest* and *latent* functions. Every specified unit, like a person, sub-group, social or cultural systems have a few objective consequences. These consequences help in the unit's adjustment or adaptation to their immediate environment. These consequences are known as *manifest functions*. On the other hand, *latent functions* are the unrecognized and unintended consequences. Merton contends that all sociologists know this difference but have not taken this up for a serious investigation. We will discuss manifest and latent functions in detail in the next unit.

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Theory of Anomie

From a functionalist position, Merton in his article 'Social Structure and Anomie' in 1938 considers not only conformity, but also deviance as a part of social structure. Instead of setting the individual in opposition to a social structure that constrains him in either a Durkheimian or Freudian sense, Merton wants to show that structure is an active factor, that it produces motivations that cannot be predicted from knowledge of native impulses or drives. It is not wayward personalities but ordinary social structure that motivates behaviour that is then labelled 'deviant'. In this respect, Merton extends the theory of functional analysis from the study of social structure, where it involves questions of order and maintenance, then to the study of order and maintenance, and ultimately to the study of social change.

However, Merton's primary aim 'is to discover how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct'. In this regard, he distinguished between cultural goals in a society and institutional norms that arise to regulate their pursuit. There is a difference between 'technically effective' means of achieving goals and 'culturally legitimate' means of achieving them. When the two coincide, the society tends to be stable. When they draw apart, or when technical efficiency is emphasized over cultural legitimacy, then the society becomes unstable and approaches a state of anomie, or a place with no norms.

Functionalist position of value, in the functional sociological theory, holds that all members of a society have the same value. However, since the positions of the actors in a social system are different, and actors positioned in different classes would differ in class positions. These actors positioned differently will definitely not have the chance to realize their values in a similar manner. He uses America as

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a basis for his study and maintains that although every American shares the same value, their achievements vary. Success in American society is mostly measured with the achievement of material possessions. America has accepted talent, hard work, drive, determination and success, coming through educational qualifications as standard means of achieving success. However, this is an unbalanced society and unlike other societies, there are no value-based means of achieving cultural goals. The people tend to bend the rules and attempt to achieve their goals. When people do not abide by rules, a state of 'anomie' flourishes. There are five ways in which Americans respond to anomie. In this regard, Merton provides his famous 'Typology of Modes of Individual Adaptation' as follows:

These categories refer to *behaviour* and not *personality*. The same person may use different modes of adaptation in different circumstances. 'Conformity' is the most widely diffused and the most common type of adaptation; otherwise society would be unstable. They strive for success by means of accepted channels. Secondly, 'innovation' rejects normative means of achieving success and turn to deviant means, in particular, crime. Merton argues that members of the lower social strata are most likely to select this route to success. They are least likely to succeed through conventional channels, thus, there is greater pressure upon them to deviate. Merton uses the term 'ritualism' to describe the third response. To him, ritualism occurs when an individual drops out of 'rat race' that monetary success requires but continues to go through the motions required by the norms of the society. Merton suggests that it is the lower-middle class that exhibits a relatively high incidence of ritualism.

The ritualist is a deviant because he has rejected the success goals held by most members of society. Merton terms the fourth and least common response as 'retreatism'. This involves rejection of both goals and norms and the 'people who fit into this category are the true aliens'—psychotics, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, drunkards and drug addicts. Merton does not relate retreatism to any social class position. Rebellion is a rejection of both the goals and the norms of the old structure and accept and actively work for the goals and norm of the new. People who wish to create a new society would take this alternative. The guerrillas in Western Europe take up the deviant path of terrorism to achieve their goals.

Merton maintains that only the lower classes take to deviant paths and the upper class that has legal means to achieve their aims and goals refrain from doing it. The rising class organizes the dejected population to bring about a revolution in order to wipe away the old order and usher in the new.

Thus, Merton shows how culture and structure of society generate deviance. The overemphasis upon cultural goals in the American society at the expense of institutionalized means creates a tendency towards anomie. This tendency exerts pressure for deviance; a pressure which varies depending on a person's position in the class structure. Merton thus explains deviance in terms of nature of society rather than nature of an individual.

Check Your Progress

1. List some of Robert K. Merton's influences.
2. What is Merton's primary aim in the theory of social structure?

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6.3 MAJOR CRITICISM OF STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

No single sociological theory in the history of the discipline has been the focus of as much interest as structural functionalism. From the late 1930s to early 1960s, it was virtually unchallenged as the dominant sociological theory for the US. By the 1960s, however, criticism of the theory had increased dramatically and ultimately became more prevalent than praise. Let us look at some of these major criticisms. We will deal first with the major *substantive* criticisms of structural functionalism and then focus on the *logical and methodological* problems associated with the theory.

Substantive Criticisms of Structural Functionalism

One major criticism is that structural functionalism does not deal adequately with history, even though structural functionalism was developed, at least in part, in reaction to the historical evolutionary approach of certain anthropologists. Many of the early anthropologists were seen as describing the various stages in the evolution of a given society or society in general. Frequently, depictions of the early stages were highly speculative. Furthermore, the later stages were often little more than idealization of the society in which the anthropologist lived. Early structural functionalists were seeking to overcome the speculative character and ethnocentric biases of these works. In its early years in particular, structural functionalism went too far in its criticism of the evolutionary theory and came to focus on either contemporary or abstract societies. However, structural functionalism needs to be historical (Turner and Maryanski, 1979). Although practitioners have tended to operate as if it were a historical, nothing in the theory prevents them from dealing with historical issues. In fact, Parsons' (1966, 1971) work on social change, as we have seen, reflects the ability of structural functionalists to deal with change if they so wish.

Structural functionalists are also attacked for being unable to deal effectively with the *process* of social change. This criticism is concerned with the parallel incapacity of the approach to deal with the contemporary process of social change. Structural functionalism is far more likely to deal with static structures than with change processes. Percy Cohen (1968) sees the problem as being in the Structural-Functional Theory, in which all the elements of a society are seen as reinforcing one another as well as the system as a whole. This makes it difficult to see how these elements can also contribute to change. While Cohen sees the problem as

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inherent in the theory, Turner and Maryanski believe, again, that the problem lies with the practitioners and not with the theory.

As per Turner's and Maryanski's views, structural functionalists frequently do not address change, and even when they do, it is in developmental rather than revolutionary terms. However, according to them, there is no reason why structural functionalists could not deal with social change. Whether the problem lies in the theory or in the theorists, the fact remains that the main contributions of structural functionalists lie in the study of static, and not changing social structures.

Perhaps the most often voiced criticism of structural functionalism is that it is unable to deal effectively with conflict. This criticism takes a variety of forms. Alvin Gouldner argues that Parsons, as the main representative of structural functionalism, tended to overemphasize harmonious relationships. Irving Louis Horowitz contends that structural functionalists tend to see conflicts as necessarily destructive and as occurring outside the framework of society. Abrahamson argues that structural functionalism exaggerates social consensus, stability and integration and, conversely, tends to disregard conflict, disorder and change. The issue once again is whether this is inherent in the theory or in the way that practitioners have interpreted and used it. Whatever one's position, it is clear that structural functionalism has had little to offer on the issue of social conflict.

The overall criticisms that structural functionalism is unable to deal with, i.e., history, change and conflict have led many to argue that structural functionalism has a conservative bias. As Gouldner states, 'Parsons persistently sees the partly filled glass of water as half full rather than half empty'. To put this in social terms, a conservative structural functionalist would emphasize the economic advantages of living in our society rather than its disadvantages.

It may indeed be true that there is a conservative bias in structural functionalism that is attributable not only to what it ignores (change, history and conflict), but also to what it chooses to focus on. For one thing, structural functionalists have tended to focus on culture, norms and values. David Lockwood (1956), for example, is critical of Parsons for his preoccupation with the normative order of society. More generally, Percy Cohen (1968) argues that structural functionalists focus on normative elements, although this is not inherent in the theory. Crucial to structural functionalism's focus on cultural and societal factors and what leads to the theory's conservative orientation is a passive sense of the individual actor. People are seen as constrained by cultural and social forces. Structural functionalists lack a dynamic, creative sense of the actor. As Gouldner says, 'human beings are as much engaged in using social systems as in being used by them'.

Related to their cultural focus is the intendency of structural functionalists to mistake the legitimizations employed by elites in society for social reality (Gouldner, 1970; Horowitz, 1962 and 1967; Mills, 1959). The normative system is interpreted as being reflective of society as a whole, when it may in fact be better viewed as an ideological system promulgated by, and existing for, the elite members of the society.

These substantive criticisms point towards certain basic directions. First, it seems clear that structural functionalism has a rather narrow focus that prevents it from addressing a number of important issues and aspects of the social world. Second, its focus tends to give it a very conservative flavour, as it was often practised and still is, to some degree. Structural functionalism operates in support of the status quo and dominance elites (Huaco, 1986).

Methodological and Logical Criticisms

One of the often expressed criticisms is that structural functionalism is basically vague, unclear and ambiguous. For example: What exactly is a structure or a function or a social system? How are parts of social systems related to each other as well as to the larger social system? Part of the ambiguity is traceable to the level on which structural functionalists choose to work. They deal with abstract social systems instead of real society, for example in much of Parsons' work, no 'real' society is discussed. Similarly, the discussion of functional prerequisites by Aberle and his colleagues (1950/1967) is not concretely tight to a real society, but occurs at a very high level of abstraction.

A related criticism is that, although no one grand scheme can ever be used to analyse all societies throughout history (Mills, 1959), structural functionalists have been motivated by the belief that there is a single theory or at least a set of conceptual categories that could be used to do this. The belief in the existence of such a grand theory lies at the base of much of Parsons' work, the functional prerequisite of Aberle and his colleagues (1950/1967), and Davis Moore's (1945) theory of stratification. Many critics regard this grand theory as an illusion, believing that the best sociology can hope for is more historically specific, 'middle-range' (Merton, 1968) theories.

Among the other specific methodological criticisms is the issue of whether there exist adequate methods to study the questions of concerned structural functionalists. For instance, Percy Cohen (1968) wonders what tools can be used to study the contribution of one part of a system to the system as a whole. Another methodological criticism is that structural functionalism makes comparative analysis difficult. If the assumption is that part of a system makes sense only in the context of the social system in which it exists, how can we compare it with a similar part in another system? Cohen asks, for example, 'if an English family makes sense only in the context of English society, how can we compare it to a French family'?

The other major criticism of the logic of structural functionalism is that it is tautological. A tautological argument is one in which the conclusion merely makes explicit what is implicit in the premise or is simply restatement of the premise. In structural functionalism, this circular reasoning often takes the form of defining the whole in terms of its parts and then defining the parts in terms of the whole. Thus, it will be argued that a social system is defined by the relationship among its component parts and that the component parts of the system are defined by their place in the larger social system. Since each is defined in terms of the other, neither

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the social system nor its parts are, in fact, defined at all. We really learn nothing about either the system or its parts. Structural functionalism has been particularly prone to tautologies, although some questions about this propensity are inherent in the theory or simply characteristics of the way most structural functionalists have used, or misused the theory.

Check Your Progress

3. List one major criticism of structural functionalism.
4. What did Alvin Gouldner had to say about Parsons' theories?

6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Robert K. Merton was influenced both by Parsons and Sorokin, though Parson's impact was more pronounced in his works.
 2. Merton's primary aim 'is to discover how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct'.
 3. One major criticism is that structural functionalism does not deal adequately with history, even though structural functionalism was developed, at least in part, in reaction to the historical evolutionary approach of certain anthropologists.
 4. Alvin Gouldner argues that Parsons, as the main representative of structural functionalism, tended to overemphasize harmonious relationships.
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6.5 SUMMARY

- Robert K. Merton is thought of as a functional analyst concerned with sociological understanding produced by research of objective, latent patterns inherent in social life.
- Merton rejected Parsons' ideology of developing an inclusive kind of theory and embraced the middle path of analysing a limited set of practical phenomena.
- Merton argued that in view of the general status of sociological knowledge and theory, Parsons' enterprises was over ambitious.
- Merton identifies the central orientation of functionalism as the practice of interpreting data by establishing their consequences for larger structures in which they are implicated.
- Functional analysis involves the search for functions. Merton's functional orientation is a shift from a static towards a dynamic image of society.

- Merton developed the notion of middle-range theory as the theoretical goal suitable for the contemporary epoch of sociology.
- Like Parsons, Merton replaced structural functionalism with functional analysis and brought functional analysis to the fore, and raised it to the level of theoretical orthodoxy.
- Instead of setting the individual in opposition to a social structure that constrains him in either a Durkheimian or Freudian sense, Merton wants to show that structure is an active factor, that it produces motivations that cannot be predicted from knowledge of native impulses or drives.
- No single sociological theory in the history of the discipline has been the focus of as much interest as structural functionalism. From the late 1930s to early 1960s, it was virtually unchallenged as the dominant sociological theory for the US. By the 1960s, however, criticism of the theory had increased dramatically and ultimately became more prevalent than praise.
- The most often voiced criticism of structural functionalism is that it is unable to deal effectively with conflict. This criticism takes a variety of forms.
- One of the often expressed criticisms is that structural functionalism is basically vague, unclear and ambiguous.
- The other major criticism of the logic of structural functionalism is that it is tautological.

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6.6 KEY WORDS

- **Anomie:** It is a condition in which society provides little moral guidance to individuals.
- **Cultural Anthropology:** It is the branch of anthropology concerned with the study of human societies and cultures and their development.
- **Ritualism:** According to Merton, ritualism occurs when an individual drops out of 'rat race' that monetary success requires but continues to go through the motions required by the norms of the society.
- **Conservative:** It is an ideology or a way of thinking that is averse to change or innovation and holding traditional values.

6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Discuss the differences between Parsons' and Merton's ideas.
2. What is a tautological argument?
3. Write a short-note on Merton's middle-range theory.

Long Answer Questions

1. Examine Merton's theory of social structure.
2. Explain Merton's theory of anomie.
3. Assess the substantive criticisms of structural functionalism.

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6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 MANIFEST AND LATENT FUNCTIONS, REFERENCE GROUP AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

*Manifest and Latent
Functions, Reference Group
and Relative Deprivation*

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Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Social Group
- 7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Key Words
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.7 Further Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we discussed Merton's theory of social structure. In this unit, the discussion will turn towards manifest and latent functions, reference group-relative deprivation.

In his prominent sociological text *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949), Merton proposed various concepts and notions of social group, association and distinction. In this text, a sincere attempt has been made to understand the notion of reference group and various other concepts inevitably associated with it, e.g. membership and non-membership groups, positive and negative reference groups and relative deprivation. This theory also helps us to understand the traits and determinants of distinct groups and their social dynamics. It also establishes the significance of these notions in the real-life environment of the society.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the notion of reference group
- Differentiate between a membership group from a non-membership group
- Discuss why human beings, in order to evaluate their identity, role, performance and achievements, choose a reference group which is distinct from their own membership
- Examine the probability, nature and scope of relative deprivation

7.2 SOCIAL GROUP

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By nature, human beings are social animals who prefer to have certain social relationships and live in a social group. A social group is nothing but a 'well-knitted structure of various social relationships'.

For example, the family (as a social institution) serves well as a significant primary group by playing several important roles in nurturing our social behaviour and thereby designing our social identity. To imagine a person without any family relations would be a rare exception that is quite difficult to imagine. Thus, a family may be referred to as a vital social group.

Similarly, as a student, we all are in relationships with other like-minded students of the same age, eligibility, inclination and objectives. In this way, a group is established in school/college whose member they become and interact with each other. Just like a family, such a student groups also play a vital role in nurturing our behaviour and social role. A student without any student group to connect with would be quite rare.

In this way, it would not be wrong to state that social relationships and social groups provide a meaning and value to our social existence. These groups are inevitable to lead a normal life in the society. They either approve or criticize our social behaviour and in this way, design the standard behaviour of a social being.

Reference Group

A reference group is a specific kind of group to which an individual refers to (on regular basis), so as to evaluate his own functions, role and expectations in the society. We all want to have a sense of approval or license from such a reference group. Knowingly or unknowingly, these groups gradually design our personality. That is why, these reference groups are sometimes also known as the 'Membership groups' (Though in the discipline of sociology, there is a technical difference between the 'membership group' and the 'reference group' which shall be discussed later).

However, in certain conditions, the group of which a person is not a member may also function as the reference groups for him. In modern times, the social life of an individual is such that his context keeps on changing; in this way, an individual comes into contact with the people (or groups) with whom neither we are connected nor we are member. We (knowingly or unknowingly) compare, criticize and evaluate our social existence through this reference groups.

It really comes as a surprise that our social life is influenced so much by the recognition which comes from somewhere outside our own contexts. It is because the 'other' provides a different (and maybe impartial) perspective to our very own social existence, role and value.

Such a perspective makes us feel contented or deprived (as the case may be) and therefore we wish to become related to those groups of which we are not

yet a member. We believe that since these groups are relatively more prestigious and significant, we should become members of them. In this way, as social beings we sometimes refer to our membership groups and sometimes even to the non-membership groups.

Let us clarify this with an apt example: A person walking in the government sector may sometimes feel fascinated by the working environment and the glossy appearance of multinational corporations and may aspire to become a part of it. In due course of time, such a group (which would actually be a non-membership group) may start functioning as a reference group for the same individual. The situation may also be the other way around. In this way, our social contexts reveal that it is not only membership groups which work as a reference groups, but in some conditions even the non-membership group may function as the reference groups for an individual.

It is human nature that we evaluate ourselves not only through our own group's perspective but also through the perspective of other groups. It is in this context that the prominent social thinker Robert K Merton presented his book entitled *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949) in which he, for the first time, proposed the 'theory of reference group' and 'the concept of relative deprivation'.

Relative Deprivation

In course of working on his prominent text *The American Soldier* (1949), Merton introduced his notion of 'deprivation' for the first time. In this book, Merton has examined the way American soldiers keep on making their own evaluation in terms of their performance, role, significance and achievements. Here, a 'Married Soldier' compares himself with the 'Unmarried Soldiers' and concludes that he, as a person, is more deprived in life than his unmarried colleagues.

In some other context, when he compares himself with the 'Married Associate' (those who do serve in the American Army but not as soldiers, so they perform desk jobs and are not supposed to go to real-life war situations), the married soldier realizes that he is expected to give more sacrifice in comparison to the associate (as he would be risking his life in the real world situation while the others need not do so). In this way, he again feels that he, as a person, is more deprived in life than his married associates.

The intention hidden behind the about two examples is that being privileged or deprived purely depends on the referential parameters and thus, these are not to be considered 'absolute terms'. The soldier (referred to here) is obviously not considering what he got in life as compared to the other two (that is the unmarried soldier and the married associate), rather he is only talking about what he is deprived of. In this case, as the difference group of comparison changes, the parameters of happiness or deprivation also gets changed.

In another set of example an Indian student gets admission in a prestigious American institute feels quite happy with his achievements. However, his happiness

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is short-lived and starts eluding as he compares himself with his Indian friends and relatives, who are still enjoying the care and company of their family members. Despite all his achievements, that Indian student starts feeling relatively deprived. Thus, it can be said that a social being always compares himself with others on different relative scales and this way, feels deprived in one way or the other. This explains the phenomena of continuous change and mobility in social life of a person.

Group membership

R.K. Merton describes three fundamental traits of group membership. These are:

- (i) **Objectivity:** It means that several people interact with each other quite frequently. In other words, the frequency of interaction is the objective parameter for a social group.
- (ii) **Membership expectations:** It means the 'patterned expectation' from the self towards the group and the expectation of other members of the group towards the self is considered necessary. Such expectation works as a 'morally binding'.
- (iii) **Sense of belongingness:** It means the sense of connectedness with the other members of the group and distinctiveness from non-member. It is considered necessary to establish the distinct identity of the group.

In this way, the identity of a social group as distinct from all other kinds of social collectivities or social categories. For instance, a nation is a collectivity but not a group. This is because of the reason that every member of the nation does not interact with each other, does not necessarily fulfil the patterned expectations, and in some exceptional case, even might not have a sense of belongingness to the nation.

That is why, a nation might consist of innumerable groups and sub-groups within it, but a nation cannot be considered as a group itself. Group members are always conscious of their distinct identity and the morally binding code of conduct within that specific group- these traits do not apply to social collectivities or a social category. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that 'every group is a collectivity, but every connectivity is not a group.'

Non-membership

Merton states that the members of a reference group usually compare their social identity (behaviour and role) with those other groups of which they are not the members. These non-members do not fulfil the fundamental parameters of a specified group, but it still their behaviour is continuously being modified by such a non-membership reference groups.

The dynamics of the non-membership can be understood in three different aspects:

- (i) Some desire to become the members of the group.
- (ii) Some remain unaffected by the group.

- (iii) Some may desire to remain unaffected or to remain as non-members here, the group constitutes a negative reference group.

This could be better understood with the help of an example: a young son of a big business tycoon has absolutely nothing to do technically with his father's Industries and corporate life right now. However, due to his sensitive and empathic nature, the young boy senses of belongingness to the group of industrial workers. Quite unknowingly, he alters his lifestyle to become a part of the workers group. This might be taken as an example of a 'non membership reference group'.

It might also be the case that the young boy may remain satisfied with the lavish life and amenities provided by his father. Obviously he would remain unaffected by the hardships, toils and exploitations of the workers' group. Neither he is a member of such a group nor he aspires to be combined this might be taken as an example of 'non-membership non-reference group'.

In the third condition, the young boy may perceive the workers as someone who are scheming, plotting and working against his father. He also feels that there is nothing cultural, intelligible or social in the workers group that is worth following. Rather than becoming a member of the group, the young boy gets cautious to remain unaffected by the group. This may be called as the 'negative reference group'.

Anticipatory Socialization

This is the phenomena of adopting ourselves in accordance with the requirements of such a group of which the person desires to be a member of. For example, imitating the behaviour or values of a non-membership reference group. If the phenomena of anticipatory socialization becomes functional, then it has to fulfil two objectives at the same time:

- Elevates his status in the group.
- Makes his adjustment easier in the new group.

However, this anticipatory socialization has some negative functions/dysfunctions as well. These are:

1. If the new group is really rigid and closed one, it might never allow the entry and adjustment of a non-member sooner or later. This might work against the proper socialization of the person and therefore might demotivate him for the future.
2. Since the person has started adapting his behaviour in accordance with the new group, it is probable that he might be disliked by his own group and therefore boycotted from his own original group. Such a person becomes 'the marginal being'.

According to Merton, the probability of choosing a non-membership reference group is relatively higher in an open and flexible group, but almost impossible in a closed and rigid group.

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Types of Reference Group

According to Merton, there are two types of reference groups. These are:

- (a) **Positive Reference Group:** It is the group which one likes and aspires to be a part of. The standard parameters of such a group are used for motivation and self-appraisal. For example, some Indians in the pre-independence era prefer to access their social existence with reference to the British colonial rulers as the positive reference group.
- (b) **Negative Reference Group:** It is a group which one usually dislikes to be a part of. Usually the norms of such a group are counteracted in the form of contradictory norms. For example, in the same pre-independence era, there were a majority of Indians who disliked the British rulers for their arrogance and suppression. So instead of aspiring to be a part of such a colonial group, they disliked it and cautiously created counter-norms against them. The British act like the negative reference group here.

Selection of Reference Group: Merton gives a detailed account of the possible determinants for the selection of a specific reference group. These are as follows:

1. **Reference Individual:** A specific group might become the reference group because specific individuals may have status and charisma. Such a person might be called the role model of the group. He/ she approximates the identity of the whole group. For example, Sachin Tendulkar for Cricket and Amitabh Bachchan for cinema may be considered as the reference individual for the whole group.
2. **Reference Group:** Among all available membership groups, an individual might belong to a variety of membership groups, e.g. housing society, political party, religious community or some caste group. Of course, all groups cannot be considered to be equally important and therefore cannot be considered as the difference group. According to Merton, a suitable classification of reference group is necessary. In fact, Merton speaks of a tentative list of 26 group properties.

Selection of the Reference Group: Though as a social being, a person belongs to a variety of groups at the same time, e.g. his family, caste, religion, school etc. He considers different parameters to be connected with these groups. These are the degrees of engagement, expected working duration of the group, degree of social distinctiveness, static ability of the group norms, the rigid or the flexible character of the group, and so on. For example, a group constructed for a very short duration, (e.g. your class group which will become redundant after one academic year once you pass that class) cannot be considered as a proper reference group. Thus, a family or caste group which is certainly going to sustain for much longer duration has a higher probability of being considered as a reference group.

This may be because the family or the caste is not a temporary group (like a school, college or class group), but seems to have a relatively permanent nature and plays a permanent and decisive role in setting our behaviour in the society.

For instance, in case of a higher-caste boy in India even if he is highly educated from an advanced educational institute, he usually prefers to marry a girl from his own caste and class.

Selection of a non-membership group: Merton says that there are three primary factors working in this case. These are:

- (i) It is influenced by the capacity of the group: The group which has less power or prestige is not preferred as a reference group.
- (ii) It influences those who are usually 'isolates' in their own groups.
- (iii) Those groups which display a higher rate of social change, mobility and flexibility have a higher probability of being accepted as the reference group.

Some Distinct traits of Reference group

Some of the distinct traits of reference groups are as follows:

- (i) **Visibility:** For being considered as a reference group, it is expected that the concerned group should have a relatively higher rate of visibility in the social set up. It needs to be noted here that this phenomena of visibility should be properly balanced with the 'need for privacy'. A group which maintains the proper equilibrium between the both requirements may easily be considered as a reference group.
- (ii) **Non-conformity:** A member of a specific group who does not conform to the prevalent norms of the group is usually considered a 'risky link' in the chain. Such a person is more prone to take a non-membership group as his reference group. In some cases, he may be considered as the initiator of change or conflict (positive or negative) in his own group.

In conclusion, we may say that the study of the abovementioned notions is necessary because:

- (i) These notions help us to understand why in a social set-up, people usually compare their identity with others and alter their social behaviour.
- (ii) Likewise, it helps us to understand how different membership and non-membership groups perform different functions in bringing about staticity and change in the society.
- (iii) It also helps us to understand the possible outcomes off relative deprivation, nonconformity to a group and the possibilities thereof.

Check Your Progress

1. What is a reference group?
2. What are the two types of reference groups?
3. When did Merton introduce the concept of deprivation for the first time?
4. Who can be considered a role model of a reference group?

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7.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. A reference group is a specific kind of group to which an individual refers to (on regular basis), so as to evaluate his own functions, role and expectations in the society.
2. The two types of reference groups are:
 - (a) Positive Reference Group
 - (b) Negative Reference Group
3. In course of working on his prominent text *The American Soldier* (1949), Merton introduced his notion of 'deprivation' for the first time.
4. A specific group might become the reference group because specific individuals may have status and charisma. Such a person might be called the role model of the group.

7.4 SUMMARY

- By nature, human beings are social animals who prefer to have certain social relationships and live in a social group.
- A social group is nothing but a 'well-knitted structure of various social relationships'.
- A reference group is a specific kind of group to which an individual refers to (on regular basis), so as to evaluate his own functions, role and expectations in the society.
- However, in certain conditions, the group of which a person is not a member may also function as the reference groups for him.
- In modern times, the social life of an individual is such that his context keeps on changing; in this way, an individual comes into contact with the people (or groups) with whom neither we are connected nor we are member. We (knowingly or unknowingly) compare, criticize and evaluate our social existence through this reference groups.
- R.K. Merton describes three fundamental traits of group membership. These are objectivity, membership expectations and sense of belongingness.
- Merton states that the members of a reference group usually compare their social identity (behaviour and role) with those other groups of which they are not the members.
- These non-members do not fulfil the fundamental parameters of a specified group, but it still their behaviour is continuously being modified by such a non-membership reference groups.

- Anticipatory socialization is the phenomena of adopting ourselves in accordance with the requirements of such a group of which the person desires to be a member of.
- According to Merton, there are two types of reference groups. These are Positive Reference Group which one likes and aspires to be a part of and Negative Reference Group which one usually dislikes to be a part of.
- A specific group might become the reference group because specific individuals may have status and charisma. Such a person might be called the role model of the group.
- Though as a social being, a person belongs to a variety of groups at the same time, e.g. his family, caste, religion, school etc. He considers different parameters to be connected with these groups. These are the degrees of engagement, expected working duration of the group, degree of social distinctiveness, static ability of the group norms, the rigid or the flexible character of the group, and so on.
- A member of a specific group who does not conform to the prevalent norms of the group is usually considered a 'risky link' in the chain. Such a person is more prone to take a non-membership group as his reference group.

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7.5 KEY WORDS

- **Reference Group:** It is a group which is generally looked up on as something aspirational, a group of which we aspire to be a part of.
- **Social Staticity:** It is the phenomena of being in the status quo - considering the norms and the practices of the society as satisfactory and thereby making no active attempt to change it further.
- **Social Mobility and Change:** It means the phenomena of comparing the membership group with other group and thus, aspiring for change in the present groups' nature or shift to some other reference group.

7.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. What are the fundamental traits of group membership?
2. What do you understand by the notion of relative deprivation?
3. Is a non-conformist in a membership group a deviant? If not, why so?

Long Answer Questions

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1. Discuss what do you understand by non-membership reference group explain with suitable examples.
2. How can you differentiate between a positive reference group from a negative reference group? Discuss with suitable examples.
3. What factors are responsible for the selection of a non-membership reference group?

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - III
CONFLICT AND DIALECTICAL
CONFLICT THEORY

Conflict Theory

NOTES

UNIT 8 CONFLICT THEORY

Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Overview of Marxism
- 8.3 Marxism and Conflict Tradition
- 8.4 Simmel's Conflict Theory
- 8.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.6 Summary
- 8.7 Key Words
- 8.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.9 Further Readings

8.0 INTRODUCTION

History is witness to the fact that conflicts have been at the base of all social revolutions. Be it conflict for power, control over economic resources or authority, it is conflict which characterizes the state of flux that society is always in. Hence theorists have used conflict to understand social order. The conflict theory is rooted in the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber, both of whom recognize that ultimately it is coercion rather than consensus that maintains social order. While Marx and Weber envisioned different forms and degrees of social stratification, both argued that conflict was the fundamental dynamic that operated between these strata. Marx saw capitalist society dichotomized into two major economic classes—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. These two classes were constantly pitted against each other. Weber acknowledged that economy was one of the determinist forces for society but asserted that political power and status were also important. Social groups would identify themselves not merely according to wealth, but more deeply by ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and by shared 'styles of life'. The different forms of conflict can be: endogenous like inherent predilections, conflict over the distribution of desirables or values or authority, and exogenous like wars, cultural invasion and conflict of ideologies.

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8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the basic concepts of Marxism such as the law of dialectics and class conflict
- Assess George Simmel's Conflict Perspective
- Discuss the relationship between Marxism and the conflict tradition

8.2 OVERVIEW OF MARXISM

Although Marx himself never used the term, many Marxists consider Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical source of several strands of Marxism. Joseph Dietzgen first used the term in 1887; however, it was only after Georgi Plekhanov - the father of Russian Marxism - used the term that it became a part of common usage in Marxian analysis.

Dialectical Materialism refers to the societal and economic transformation born of material forces. Essentially, the concept of dialectical materialism suggests that all historical growth and change results from the struggle of opposites. To put it another way, history is the creation of class struggle, i.e., the class struggle between the capitalist and landowning classes, on the one hand, and the proletariat and peasantry, on the other. Dialectical Materialism or 'diamat' follows the Hegelian principle of philosophy of history, which is the growth of thesis into anti-thesis that is sublated by synthesis. This synthesis preserves the thesis and the anti-thesis and simultaneously rises above them both.

Law of Dialectics

Marxism is a fundamentally materialist philosophy because its foundation is the belief that the overall account of everything is matter which is the characteristic of reality. Another important aspect of Marxian analysis is the belief that matter is independent in forming the course of nature which detaches dialectical materialism.

According to Engels, 'All nature, from the smallest thing to the biggest, from a grain of sand to the sun, from the protista to man, is in a constant state of coming into being and going out of being, in a constant flux, in a ceaseless state of movement and change.' Thus, the fundamental suggestion of dialectics is that everything is in a continuous process of change, motion and development. Even when there is an appearance that no change is taking place, actually, matter is always changing. Molecules, atoms and subatomic particles are always on the move, continually changing place. Therefore, dialectics is essentially a dynamic understanding of the phenomena and processes which occur at all levels of both organic and inorganic matter.

Using Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Engels derived the three laws of dialectics. Through the laws Engels tries to respond to the problems associated with both nature and humanity. Marxian analysis uses the laws to answer queries such as:

- What is the starting point of energy or activity start in nature?
- Why does the continuous proration in the number of galaxies, solar system, planets, animals and all the realms of nature take place?
- When does the mind begin to become aware of things?
- Why is society regulated and in which direction is such regulation headed?
- Does the study of the past include an ending; if it is then what will it be?

The three laws of dialectics are as follows:

Law of Opposites

Marx and Engels began with the impression that everything in reality is a combination of opposites. An illustration of this point is that electricity is made up of a positive and negative charge. Moreover, any student of science can tell you that atoms are made up of protons and electrons that are united, but essentially are opposing forces. Engels' conclusion is that everything 'contains two mutually incompatible and exclusive but nevertheless equally essential and indispensable parts or aspects'. The essential idea is that this coming together of opposites in the natural world is the trait which makes every unit auto-dynamic in nature. It also ensures a nonstop drive for movement and transformation. As Hegel stated, 'contradiction in nature is the root of all motion and of all life'.

This dichotomy more often than not exists in the natural world. In space gravity drives every molecule to the core of a star allowing it to be held collectively, at the same time, extremely high temperatures force the molecules to stay as far away from the core as possible. If either of any of the two pulls is totally successful, the star does not survive. If extremely high temperature is triumphant, the star blows up into a supernova. On the other hand, a black hole or a neutron star is the result if gravitational pull is successful in pulling molecules to the core of a star. Similarly, live beings endeavour to stabilize inside and outside forces to sustain the state of homeostasis, i.e., the stabilization of contrasting powers, like acidity and alkalinity.

Law of Negation

According to the law of negation, there is a predisposition in the environment towards continuously raising the numerical amount of all things. Marx and Engels state that to organize, to move forward or to replicate a superior number, creatures are inclined in the direction of negating themselves. The nature of opposing forces is such that it is inclined to negate the thing itself, at the same time this negation results in divergence in every part and gives them movement. Consequently,

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creatures progress because of this energetic course of beginning and obliteration. This law can also be framed as the sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

To illustrate the law of negation, Engels frequently referred to the example of the barley seed. The barley seed in the natural state sprouts (which is the death of a seed or negation) and produces a plant, which grows into ripeness. After the plant becomes ripe, it is itself negated after giving birth to barley seeds. In the social world, class also illustrates the law of negation. Historically speaking, the nobility was wiped out by the bourgeoisie revolution; this also helped create the proletariat. In Marxian analysis, this proletariat will eventually wipe out the bourgeoisie. Thus, this law suggests that every class produces its own ‘gravediggers’, its heirs, no sooner it finishes laying to rest its originator.

Law of Transformation

The law of transformation states that constant quantitative growth leads to changes in quality by ‘leaps’ in the environment, resulting in the production of a totally new variety or creature. This is the way in which ‘quantitative development becomes qualitative change’. In the process of transformation, the rendering null and void of quality affecting quantity is also permitted.

This law has many similarities to the theory of evolution. Marxian analysis suggests that creatures in the course of quantitative growth are in addition essentially able to ‘leap’ to new appearances and stages of realism. The law is shown by the example of a volcanic eruption after the process of years of pressure building up. When the magma cools down after an eruption, it turns the land which was unproductive into productive land. In the social world, years of stress among contrasting classes or groups in society become the cause of an uprising. The law also occurs in reverse. For example, the introduction of better agriculture tools (changing quality) to farmland help in producing bigger amount (changing quantity) of agriculture output.

According to Marxist analysis, a collection of persons having familiar characteristics is not a class. For example, the proletariat cannot be labelled as a collection of people ‘as against capital’. In a societal setting, class is not organizational or related to a particular ‘place’ (a position in society which a person may possibly ‘occupy’ or persons might be ‘interpolated’, etc.). Rather, Marxists believe that class is a societal bond ‘like capital itself’ (Marx 1965, 766). A bond is neither a collection of people even when there may be bonding in a specified collection of people or a position where a group may be formed or situated. Keeping away such ideas, it can be said that class is *the relation itself* (like the relationship between capital and labour) more particularly, *a relation of struggle*. Thus, the basic principle of *class* is *class struggle*. To put it another way, ‘class struggle is class itself’. Marx noted that ‘class struggle’ is fundamental to ‘class’ by emphasizing that survival ‘for itself’—which is the conflicting survival under pressure—is fundamental to the survival of ‘class’ (Marx 1969, 173).

Marxist and sociological analysis of class

Conflict Theory

The sociological origin of the term class results in an awkwardness - every person of bourgeois society is not clearly the integral part of the groups labelled 'capitalists' and 'proletarians'. This awkwardness is produced by the origin of classes as 'groups' or 'places' and to escape this sociological Marxism has taken refuge in labels like 'middle strata', 'middle classes' and so on. These labels are residual or consisting of the collection of people and are academic fabrications created by poor theoretical system. On the other hand, Marxist origin of class comes across no such problems, which considers class-bonding (for example, capital-labour bonding) as organizing the lives of dissimilar persons in dissimilar ways.

There is a disparity among the Marxists and sociological analysis. Marxists observe the 'pure' labour (positioned at the farthest left-hand region), whose societal position (every one of dissimilar 'intermediate' forms) is not in any way at odds and in opposition to him, and he is by no means 'methodologically' advantaged; nor the 'pure' industrialist. Together they somewhat are viewed merely as forms fused together with each other in differently arranged multitude. Alternatively, the sociological observation takes care of the 'pure' labour in addition to the 'pure' industrialist like 'methodological pillars' suspended among the network of transitional classes.

According to Marx, this dissimilarity is significant as the 'pure' worker or labour does not exist. This is not for the reason of comparative reduction of the size of the 'traditional working class' (even if the particular hypothetically imagined collection of people is distinct). In fact, the opposite is true as the income bonding is a 'bourgeois and mystifying form' (Marx 1965 Part VI). And whosoever stays within its parameter, even and particularly the industrialist, who is a manufacturer of 'surplus value', lives a life separated with himself. His roots stay caught up in exploiting the labour while he dreams of idealist 'bourgeois' reality. Therefore, the series of class conflict goes all the way through the person who produces 'surplus-value'. Again, for the Marxist origin of class, there is no awkwardness in concerning the particular methods in which capital-labour bonding organizes in a hostile way. On the other hand, absence of the working class in its pristine form reduces the sociological origin of the class and brings it to the lowest level.

An additional marked divergence among the both formats of the Marxist view which states about a single class bonding (specifically, the capital-worker bonding) occurring in the present social order but the sociological proposal recognize numerous associations equal to the number of probable connections among societal space or collection of people. On this basis, the 'sociologists' lay blame on the 'Marxists' of decreasing societal divisions. In fact, sociologists have to be blamed of the charge of decreasing on these lines. The sociologists desire to place every person explicitly with no remnants in single or otherwise extra particular crowds or situations: a 'cross categorical' person is not capable of emerging within the depiction drawn by the sociologists.

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The basis of sociologists' increase of societal divisions into various levels like 'middle class' 'new petty bourgeoisies', and so on is to search a clearly consigned slot for every person. Therefore, there exist specifically the patterns in which the expressions of class and the persons are alienated among themselves—the numerical complexity of the pattern system in which the 'geological fracture-line' of the conflict of class is present throughout is not just among person but casts a shadow on the hypothesis as well.

An associated position of Marxist origin is—different from that of sociologists'—that class is not interpreted in the expression of attitude having anyone of various societal responsibilities. Since his earliest work '*On the Jewish Question*' and beyond, Marx criticized any societal environment where classification of the responsibilities is acquired as 'alienated' and not liberated. Far from marking the classification of responsibilities as a procedural theory, Marxian outlook of class portrays the person as a location of conflict; the individual conflict results in not merely as the 'universal' (attitude of responsibility and collectively alike), however in addition 'particular' (distinctive and in social context diverse) proportion of individualism participation. Neither theoretically nor practically has the classification of responsibilities liked 'proletarian' or 'bourgeois' (otherwise definitely 'man' or 'woman' or 'citizen') symbolizes the explanation of Marx; quite oppositely they form at the same time as one amongst the many tribulations which 'class' within its descriptions is proposed to solve.

While among the Marxist and the sociological origins of class, again one more spot of dissimilarity is, naturally, political. The sociological outlook promotes policy of coalitions among classes and portions of class: along with it gives emphasis to the 'pure' labourer's class an advantaged—important and dominant—political character. In Marxist outlook, there is impossibility of these types of coalitions. The 'pure' labourer class (a person in a job as compared to jobless, the 'direct' manufacturers of 'surplus value' compared to the 'indirect' manufacturers, the 'proletariat' compared to the '*lumpen proletariat*') does not have politically a procedural advantaged position, as these 'places' do not subsist. There is no issue of assigning to 'rising' as compared to 'declining' classes to domination of radical significance or power: these terms only make sense as soon as classes are viewed as positions or as collectivity of people. Lastly, the entire idea of forefront political party (added with its watered down variations) is reversed as the dissimilarities among 'advanced' plus 'backward' class fundamentally fade away amid the sociological origin of class.

However, classes are not a collectivity of people or positions except bonds of conflict, therefore radical struggle obtains the shape of struggle among the collectivity (for all times it happens improperly and contaminatedly) which is implicitly the result of class conflict. It is not implicitly sociological as in the case, the appearance of 'pre given' classes—next to very last—interested more in already known academic and opinionated 'truth'. The issue facing the person is not on *whose* region however relatively, on *which* region (which region of class bonding)

he or she is situated; and yet this concluding query is not implicitly the collective preference among the surviving positions or responsibilities. Not merely, in terms of quantity as well as in terms of quality, the characteristic feature of conflict of class is natural inconsistency. The focal point of the Marxist origin of class penetrating the question of alternatives by means of which class conflict deals with us and in this procedure forbids plea to whichever responsibility or position or collectivity of people in which (according to sociology) we are by now situated *prior to* whatsoever our decisive promise we want to make.

The sociological origin of class, every time it needs to set up Marxist identification, forever turns into 'economic-determinist'. This is for the reason that the single 'indicator' of class link ('class' at this point being viewed again as a position or collectivity of people) is, according to Marx's work, the universal bonding to the 'means of production'. In addition to being bonded to the 'means of production', nevertheless persons are part of a class, and locate themselves bonded to the state and to 'ideology' and also to the local church and so on. Therefore, the sociological origin of class produces a system of detached societal 'levels' or 'practices' or 'instances' (Althusser) and has to tackle query of how these 'levels' are linked. The reply is familiar: in the last instance 'the economic movement asserts itself as necessary'. In additional terminology, sociological Marxism totals to a fiscal conclusion with lengthy and intricate 'deterministic' series. To assert that, as Althusser did, such a premise is no longer fiscal is like maintaining that a machine is no longer machine due to the asset of number of cogwheels its motor drives.

The whole thing is dissimilar to the Marxist origin of class. Marx's difference among class 'in itself' and 'for itself' is in use as unique, not among the ranks of society but among the sociological and the Marxist origins of class itself: if a class turns out to be as soon as it is 'for itself' subsequently *political struggle* by means of all its erratic consequences and growth and expenses previously put together into what sociological Marxists identify as fiscal 'base'. While sociological Marxists try to unify ranks which it presumes to be separate and on the foundation of the threshold and difficulty can rely on the cause and effect and *external* associations nevertheless 'structural' (Althusser) variety; Marxist Marxism travels in the reverse direction and illustrates differences contained by an opposing entirety, i.e., inside an internally and destructively associated sum total: 'The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence the unity of the diverse' (Marx 1973, 101). The *totality* of the relation between various classes which is specific to, to take an example, bourgeois society is prevalent—wholly prevalent, though in characteristically different ways—in each individual who forms that society's *moments* or part. As Lukács stated, 'it is not the primacy of the economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality'.

Alongside with 'the point of view of the totality', a completely new origin of *class politics* is initiated. Previously 'politics' is perceived as a separate societal

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rank; the confirming assessment of the survival of class ‘for itself’ develops into creation of a political association of almost traditional—meaning to say: ‘a bourgeois’-type. It is viewed that still a forefront party is perceived to different ‘bourgeois’ idea. Nevertheless, the ‘bourgeois’ social order, not Marx differentiates among the ranks of political state and general social order—‘On the Jewish Question’—and recommends the previous as the ground where the societal collection of people in their readiness may participate. In the added terms, Marxist origin of class, ‘the point of view of totality’ discards specifically the *narrowness* of the formation of politics which the sociological origin of class necessitates. On top of the Marxist perception, the classification of politics develops into extensive variety in which class conflicts erratically take place. Not only no subject is disqualified from the political program; the idea of political program is itself disqualified as this type of program disqualifies and brings to periphery all that which is not part of some tentatively conventional political sphere of influence.

The already mentioned explanations do not assert to the wholeness or to the condition of a justification of the origin of the class which have been tried systematically to be retold. They aspire to, somewhat, make it lucid about what the Marxist perception of class involves. As for the consideration of the assessment of this perception, the proposition may possibly be dangerous that the *only possible* way of analytical inquiry which appears to be productive that which enquires is the ‘capital-labour relation’ is the only and exclusive such bonding of conflict which, in every part of its fulfilment, constitutes our lives. And at this point there can be no doubt of replacing Marx: additional types of bonding (sexual and racial bonds, for example) are arbitrated all the way through the ‘capital relation’ just as for its fractions; it subsists as arbitrated all the way through them.

The first and foremost sociologist and economist of the capitalist regime was Marx. He had a certain notion of that regime, of the fate it imposed upon men, and of the progression it would go through. As sociologist-economist of the system, he had the capitalist view of the sociological issues; he had no exact image of what the socialist system would be, and he repeatedly said that man cannot know the future in advance.

From 1848 until the end of his life, Marx apparently ceased to be a philosopher and became a sociologist and, more of, an economist. He had received an excellent economic education and knew the economic thinking of his time a few men did. He was, and wanted to be, an economist in the strict and precise sense of the word.

Communist Manifesto

In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels presented some of their scientific thoughts in combined form. The vital theme of the work was class struggle. In it they state that all history is the history of the class struggle: free men and slaves, patricians and plebeians, barons and serfs, master artisans and journeymen. In short, the oppressors and oppressed have been in perpetual conflict with one

another and have carried on a relentless struggle, at times covert, at time open. This struggle has always resulted in a revolution that changes the whole of society or with the mutual devastation of the warring classes. The work stated that all societies in human history have been divided into such warring classes, contemporary capitalist society is no different. However, what is different between contemporary capitalist society and societies that preceded is that the ruling class of capitalist society, i.e., the bourgeoisie, has certain characteristics which are without precedent.

Marxian analysis believes that the capitalist ruling class is unable to maintain its superiority without permanently revolutionizing the instruments of production. Thus, while previous ruling classes took many centuries to develop the forces of production, the ruling class of capitalist society was able to develop them in a few decades. *The Communist Manifesto* states that the means of production has revolutionarised by the bourgeoisie by engaging in heartless competition. Moreover, they have created a global market for themselves which is destroying the leftovers of the feudal system and traditional communities. However, just like the forces that gave birth to capitalism developed in a feudal society, similarly, the forces of production which will give birth to socialism are developing in modern society.

According to Marx, between the capitalist ruling class and proletariat there exists various in-between groups like artisans, petite bourgeoisie, merchants and peasant landowners. However, he suggested that along with the development of the capitalist regime there will be a tendency towards crystallization of social relations into two groups: the capitalists and the working class or wage workers. For Marx, only these two classes represent the possibility for a political system and an idea of a social system. When the revolution comes, everyone will be obliged to join either the capitalists or the working class. On the day when the working class seizes power, there will be a final split with the course of all previous history. In fact, the hostile nature of all known societies will disappear.

Marx thus regarded politics and the state as less important to what was occurring within the society itself. He presented political power as the appearance of social conflicts. Marx believed that in reality political power was the means by which the ruling class maintained its control and exploitation. Thus, the abolition of class contradictions must logically involve the disappearance of politics and of the state, because politics and the state are the expressions of social conflict. The idea is that men enter into specific relations that are independent of their will; in other words, we can follow the progress of history by analysing the structure of societies, the forces of productions and the relations of production, and not by basing our explanation on men's ways of thinking about themselves. In every society there can be a notable economic base, or infrastructure, as it has come to be called, and the superstructure. The infrastructure consists basically of the forces and relations of production, while within the superstructure there are the legal and political institutions as well as ways of thinking, ideologies and philosophies. The instrument of the historical movement is the opposition between the forces and the relations

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of production. The forces of production seem to be basically a given society's capability to produce, a capability which is a function of scientific knowledge, technological equipment and the organization of combined labour while the relations of production seem to be basically distinguished by relation of property.

Check Your Progress

1. What is considered to be the theoretical source of several strands of Marxism?
2. How is Marxism a fundamentally materialist philosophy?
3. What is the theme of *The Communist Manifesto*?

8.3 MARXISM AND CONFLICT TRADITION

Let us now discuss concepts like coercion and integration.

Integration and Values vs. Coercion and Interests

History is witness to the fact that there have been two conflicting viewpoints to the question: how do human societies come together? A major school of thought promotes that social order results from a general agreement of values, a *consensus omnium* or *volonte generale* which erases all differences of opinion and interest. Another opinion holds that order in society is based on dominance and violence of a stronger group over another more submissive one. The Utopians, or those who believe that order prevails due to consensus, do not deny the existence of differences of interest. At the same time, the rationalist who considers that order is achieved through constraint and domination, does not deny that agreements of value are required for the very establishment of force. For the Utopian, the conflicting interests are translated to agreements and for the Rationalist these agreements are an ineffective veneer of conflicts that need to be reconciled by force and constraint. Both sides argue vociferously for their cause. The actors included in this conflict include, Aristotle and Plato, Hobbes and Rousseau and Kant and Hegel.

Thus we see the two faces of society akin to the conflicting views of Utopians and Rationalists. Marx subscribed to an image of society of the Rationalist variety. He believed that conflict of interests, domination and exploitation and the consequent revolt against these would lead to change or a new social order. Hence society produces within itself the forces that maintain the very process of change through conflict. The Utopian view is apparent in the works of Drucker and Mayo, according to which happy consensus and cooperation is the normal state of social life. According to them social structure is an integrated system held together with consensus. These theories are mutually exclusive. There are sociological problems which are resolved through the use of the integration theory, and at the same time some issues can be explained only by the rationalists who believe in conflict and coercion. There are also certain problems for which either of the two theories

would prove adequate as society is often considered to be two faced, and having equivalent aspects of the same reality.

In recent years, we see the prevalence of the integration theory of society. Though this partiality has many drawbacks, it also has at least one major advantage, in that it gives rise to critical objections which enables us to evaluate the theory. Talcott Parsons is a major critic of this theory. We will not go into detail about Parson's work here, but in order to make a systematic presentation of the group conflict theory we need to examine one objection to Parson's position. D. Lockwood claims that Parson's concepts and assumptions touch the problem of the two faces of society but it does not expose the problem with sufficient clarity. While it is true that Parsons' work is biased towards analysis on the basis of norms and values, other theorists analyse 'conflict' on the basis of the institutional aspects of social structure. Marx's work is a case in point. But this difference is not relevant to an understanding of 'alternative images' of society prevalent in political thought and sociological theory. In fact both the 'normative elements in social action' and a factual 'substratum of social action', which Lockwood takes over from the work of Renner, only indicate different levels of analysis of the social structure which are in no way contradictory.

Lockwood's objections to Parsons theory are significant. In contrasting stability and instability, integration and conflict equilibrium and disequilibrium, values and interests Lockwood presents a real alternative of thought, which is not there in Parson's work. In his entire work Parsons has recognized only one model of society, the Utopian or Integration theory of society. His 'array of concepts' is therefore incapable of explaining the complexity of issues with which Lockwood is concerned and which constitute the subject matter of the present day.

The integration theory of society, as displayed by the work of Parsons and other structural-functionalists, is founded on a number of assumptions. These are:

- (i) Each society is constituted of a relatively persistent, stable structure of elements.
- (ii) Every society is a well-integrated structure of elements.
- (iii) The system is maintained by the contribution of each of these elements.
- (iv) The consensus of values among its members defines the functioning of the social structure.

These four assumptions are common to all structural-functional approaches and enable a scientific analysis of social reality. Yet they are criticized for being too general and broad.

The coercion theory of society can also be reduced to a small number of basic tenets:

- Processes of change are there at every point in society.
- Social conflict is there at every point in society.

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- Every element in society contributes to its disintegration and change
- In each society some members are coerced by others.

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These assumptions too are there only for purposes of scientific analysis and provide a coherent image of social organization. Yet they too are very general and broad.

In a sociological context, these two models constitute complementary, rather than alternative, tools to understand society. Certain issues may be analyzed and explained better by one theoretical perspective than the other, but both models are significant for sociological analysis. The dialectics of stability and change, integration and conflict, functions and motive force, consensus and coercion are imperative to a comprehensive understanding of society. This is more or less generally accepted by sociologists in all countries. Categories like role, institutions, norm, structure, even functions are as useful in terms of the coercion model as they are for the analysis of social integration. In fact, the dichotomy of aspects is visible through all levels of sociological analysis. Radcliffe-Brown uses the notions of interest and values for the two faces of normative super structures of society. Integration theory's 'consensus of values' is coercion theory's 'conflict of interests'.

While logically appropriate, it raises some serious issues. It becomes impossible to think of society on the basis of one model only. According to the conflict theory there can be no conflict, unless this conflict occurs within a context of meanings, i.e., some kind of coherent, integrated system. Similarly integration theory presupposes the existence of different elements that are integrated. Therefore it is more a matter of emphasis rather than of fundamental difference. The theory of group conflict has to have recourse to the integration theory of social structure.

There will be queries as to why an integrated model using the combined views of both these theories cannot be used, but it seems that unification of the theory is not feasible. The reason for this continues to puzzle all thinkers of Western philosophy.

Power and Authority

The integration theory of social structure defines social systems as voluntary groupings of people sharing the same values and who establish societies for the effortless striving towards their common goals. In the coercion theory, people do not come together on a voluntary basis but are forced to form social organizations. Thus, in every social organization there is a distribution of power which is not always even and some positions dominate over others. Wherever there are such situations of domination and subjection, group conflicts are to be expected. Conflict analysis identifies various authority roles and further analysis follows from this investigation of distributions of power and authority.

The concept of power is not a subject that can be agreed upon either in the social sciences, or in political science or sociology. Max Weber, Pareto and Mosca have long debated this theme without being able to come to a consensus. According

to Weber, 'power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'; whereas 'authority, is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons'. Power is associated with the personality of individuals, whereas authority is linked to social positions and roles. The demagogue exercises 'power' over the masses to whom he speaks due to his personality, but the control of the officer or manager over his men, is authority, as it is derived from the specific position he occupies. Without that position he no longer wields the same power.

Along with the term 'authority' we are introduced to the terms 'domination' and 'subjection'. These are used to imply the empowering with authority (domination) and dispossessing of authority (subjection).

Conflict analysis basically focuses on the generation of conflict groups as a result of authority relations. Authority is a type of social relation present in each and every social organization and such organizations can be termed as associations. Thus, the State, Church, Enterprise, Political parties, Trade unions, etc., are all associations as they require coordination of roles by subjection or domination. Relations of authority exist in all associations. When social organizations are reviewed in terms of their structure of coercion and constraint instead of integration and coherence, they can be defined as coordinated associations rather than a social system. As social organizations are also associations, they generate conflicts leading to conflict groups.

Some sociologists assert that authority is a characteristic of social organizations while others argue that in some contemporary societies authority has been replaced by an anonymous 'rule of the law'. However, every social structure has people who are authorized to wield legitimate power. Some kind of authority is always exercised somehow, be it the feudal lord and his slaves in the ancient times, the capitalist and his worker in the medieval era, the appointed manager of a modern enterprise and its employees or the elected prime minister of a democratic country.

The notion of power and authority employed here represents what Parsons terms as the 'zero sum' concept of authority. According to Mills power is interpreted as a facility for getting the wants of one group, (those who possess power) to prevent another group from getting what it wants. According to Parson, the capacity to mobilize the resources of society for the attainment of goals which are publicly committed is at the core of this phenomenon. Individuals with a position in society are bound by virtue of their position to mobilize resources.

Power or Authority symbolizes the functional integration of social systems. For instance, in many contexts the elected president or prime minister of democratic countries represents his country as a whole but in other contexts, however, the chief of government is merely the representative of the majority party and therefore represents only sectional interest. It can thus be concluded like all other elements

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of social structure, authority has two faces. One cannot be ignored to the exclusion of the other. In this sense authority is productive of conflict and is not only (or even primarily) a facility for the performance of a function on behalf of the society as a system. This is what Parsons calls the 'negative functions' of authority. This aspect is more appropriate for the analysis of structurally generated systematic social conflicts.

Parsons in bringing out this negative face of authority brings out another aspect for consideration. He claims that out of the two groups or aggregates of persons the one which possesses authority does so to the extent to which the other one is deprived of it. Hence there is always a dichotomy of positions, with respect to the distribution of authority. Parsons in his critique of Mills compares the distribution of authority to the distribution of wealth. There is always a constant need to possess more, irrespective of how much one possesses. Wealth is not and cannot be conceived as a zero-sum concept. With respect to authority, a clear line can be drawn between those who wield or exercise power and those who are subject to the authoritative commands of others.

Authority in the modern context is affected by the modern process of division of labour. There are groups which do not exercise authority other than by complying with given commands or prohibitions. Contrary to all criteria of social stratification, authority does not permit hierarchies. Therefore, hierarchies that exist in organizational charts demonstrate the differentiation of domination. At the same time, in every association, there are people who are subjected to authority rather than exercising it.

This dichotomy of positions of authority is specific to some associations only. In a democracy, voters who are the common people wield as much power as ministers of a cabinet level or higher civil servants. Although positions of authority can differ according to the organization, these positions cannot be generalized. Interestingly individuals in a given society can be ranked according to the sum total of their authority positions in all associations. Such an analysis will yield scales of stratification according to income or prestige. For this reason, the unit of analysis should always be a specific association and the dichotomy of positions within it.

Total societies like individuals do not usually present an 'unambiguously dichotomic authority structure'. Any given society is made up of coordinated associations with their patterns of domination and subjection. But domination in industry does not necessarily translate into domination in the state, or a church, or other associations. A picture of plurality emerges. There are competing dominant (and conversely, subjected) aggregates. This, again, is a problem for the analysis of specific historical societies. It cannot be compared to the domination and subjection patterns of an association.

Hence by identifying the incumbents of positions of domination and subjection in any given association, one can identify a significant type of conflict which occurs in this association at all times.

As to the dichotomy of authority positions, in imperatively coordinated associations, it follows that within specific contexts, some have authority and others do not. If either nobody or everybody had authority, the concept would lose its meaning. Authority implies both domination and subjection, and therefore two distinct, sets of positions or persons. There is also a distinction between those who have a great deal of authority and those who have little authority. But such differentiation may be only important for empirical analysis. It does not affect the border line somewhere between those who have little authority and those who do not have any authority. Stating that there is a dichotomy of authority positions is tautological, but as this example, shows, there are tautologies which are worth stating.

Having thus established the frame of reference and basic assumptions of a sociological theory of conflict, we now turn to its more specific elements- first with respect to patterns of conflict between these groups.

Elite and Ruling Classes

The conflict model presupposes the existence of two groups having conflicting interests.

The model of class formation explains the conflict between quasi groups determined by the distribution of authority in associations. Pareto, Mosca and Aron operate with a two-class model and unlike Marx and Weber they focus on the group possessing authority, the members of which occupy positions of domination. In describing dominating conflict groups, Mosca discusses the 'ruling class'. This refers to the political class discussed in his work *Elementi di Scienza Politica*. Pareto describes the category of 'elite' though he distinguishes between governing and non-governing elites, and devotes as much attention to the latter as to the former. Aron has narrowed down the notion of 'elite' to the minority that exercises power; elsewhere he speaks of ruling classes.

All three authors deal with the tendency of the dominating groups to maintain and defend its domination terming it as the problem of 'inertia'. The role of legitimacy in the maintenance of change of authority structures is also discussed. Mosca and Pareto in particular emphasize the problem of social stability. They touch upon the psychology of conflict groups, discuss in some detail the formation and disintegration of aristocracies. Analysing historical documentation, they deal with other aspects of social change.

Masses and Suppressed Classes

Subjected conflict groups must not be visualized as essentially unorganized masses without effective forces. In analogy to the characteristic of ruling groups we can state that:

- (i) They do not necessarily comprise the majority of the members of an association.

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- (ii) Their members are not necessarily connected by properties, or a culture beyond the interests that bind them into groups.
- (iii) Their existence is always related to particular associations, so that one society may display several subjected conflict groups.

Beyond these, one distinguishing feature of subjected groups must be emphasized. The Marxian expression 'suppressed classes', might appear to mean that any such group is characterized by the attributes which Marx ascribed to, the proletariat of his time. However, this implication is by no means intended here. Pauperism, slavery, absolute exclusion from the wealth and liberty of society is a possible but unnecessary attribute of the incumbents of roles of subjection. Here, again, the connection is indeterminate, i.e., variable and its particular pattern can be established only by empirical observation and for a particular association. It is not only conceivable that the members of the subjected group of one association belong to the dominating group of another association, it is above all possible that suppressed classes, enjoy, despite their exclusion from legitimate power, an (absolutely) high measure of social rewards. Group conflicts are solely based on the one criterion of participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority in imperatively coordinated associations. Difficult as it may be for minds schooled in Marx, to separate the category of suppressed class, from the ideas of poverty and exploitation, a well-formulated theory of group conflict requires the radical separation of these spheres.

Classes or Conflict Group

Up to this point we have postponed and at times avoided the question whether the concept of class, is a useful concept to employ and, if so, what is its precise meaning in the context of the theory of conflict-group formation. The problem of the applicability of the concept of class, is a purely terminological problem. In positive terms, this means that it is in part a matter of arbitrary decision, and in part a matter of convenience. Logically, there is no reason why we should not call quasi-groups and interest groups classes or anything else. Pragmatically, of course the usage and history of words has to be considered; it is unwise to provoke misunderstandings by choosing words which carry associations that are not intended. However the 'historical concept', of class is inseparably tied to a definite historical entity such as the industrial proletariat of the nineteenth century. Historical concepts of this kind are fictions of Hegelianism or more generally conceptual realism.

So far in our considerations there have emerged four main reasons why the concept of class should not be applied to the analysis of conflicts in post-capitalist societies.

1. The first of these is of a historical nature. We have seen that the changes which have occurred since Marx's time have in several ways affected the classes with which he was concerned. Bourgeoisie and proletariat are no longer uniform blocs of identically situated and oriented people, if indeed,

they can be said to exist at all in post-capitalist society. The progressive institutionalization of the values of achievement and equality has removed many barriers, which for Marx, were associated with the concept of class. Without anticipating the results of empirical analysts we can conclude that conflict groups in modern society are likely to be rather loose aggregations for special purposes and within particular associations. In view of factual developments of this kind, it certainly seems questionable whether it is useful to employ the Marxian concept of classes of the nineteenth century to the conflict groups of advanced industrial society today.

2. This doubt is strengthened by a second argument accruing from our theoretical considerations in the present chapter. We have deliberately restricted our model of group formation to elementary and highly formal features of the phenomenon. Most of the empirical characteristics of conflict groups are subject to a wide range of variability the limits of which may be fixed in terms of a constructed model but the substance of which needs to be determined by observation and experience. Conflict groups may not need to be characterized by a class culture, but they may need to, engage in violent conflict. Moreover we have endeavoured to detach the category of conflict groups and the whole notion of social conflict from economic determinants, both in the Marxian sense of relations of production and ownership and in the Weberian sense of socio-economic class situations. Conceptually, the similarity between Marx's and even Weber's concepts of class and our concept of conflict group is slight, though there is reasonable doubt as to whether there is a chance for the concept of class not to be misunderstood if it is applied to conflict groups in the sense of this study.
3. Thirdly, in addition to these general conceptual differences the question must be raised: what precisely do we mean by class even if we decide to apply this term to conflict groups? Are we to follow Ginsberg and conceive of classes as quasi-groups, i.e., unorganized aggregates of the occupants of positions endowed with role interests? Or are we to follow Marx calling classes only such groups as have attained political organization and coherence and which are interest groups? Distinctions such as between collectively and class or class and party or class in itself and class for itself are necessary. But they do not exactly help to render the concept of class unambiguous.
4. Finally, the history of the concept and sociological literature has to be considered. One may deplore the fact that the terms class and stratum have tended to become interchangeable categories in sociological studies. While the existence of a difference between the study of social conflict and the study of social stratification is probably plausible to anybody, the concepts of class and stratum as they are often used today fail to express this difference. Under these conditions, it may not be wise to try to restore to the concept of class a meaning, which may have been lost long ago.

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There are on the other hand, three arguments that might be held against the doubt about the applicability of the concept of class to conflict groups in the sense of our model.

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1. First, the alternative category of conflict group is so general it is almost embarrassing. We have explicitly distinguished it from other conflicts which arise from the distribution of authority in associations. Yet there is no conceivable reason other than an inconveniently narrow definition, why the conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, Negroes and whites, town and country should not be called conflict groups. Short of using a more specific but extremely clumsy, expression (such as conflict groups arising from authority structures in associations), the concept of class seems to provide a convenient tool for our understanding.
2. This is secondly, all the more plausible, since the heuristic purposes originally associated with the concept of class is also the heuristic purpose of the study. When Marx adapted the word 'class' to the requirements of his theories, he used this word as a term for structurally generated groups that engage in conflict within the existing arrangements of social structure. It is true that before Marx the term class was used by a number of authors in a less specific sense. But it is probably fair to say that it was the Marxist category which became germinal for later students in the field and which therefore represents its original version. The essential importance of this heuristic purpose has been emphasized at many points in our consideration. Since there is no other concept that expresses this purpose with equal clarity, one might consider it reasonable to retain the concept of class despite the arguments against it.
3. Thirdly, however, there is one not entirely insignificant branch of sociological thinking which has consistently used the term class in the form, if not in the substance assigned to it by Marx. This is true not only for many Marxist scholars but also for eminent non-Marxist sociologists such as Renner and Geiger, Aron and Gurvitch, Pareto and Mosca, Marshal and Ginsberg, Lipset and Bendix, and many others. Many of them have tried to define the concept of class by maintaining its heuristic purpose while altering its substance; quite often this altering of substance meant a shift from property to power. In using the concept of class for Marx's bourgeoisie and proletariat as well as for modern and utterly different conflict groups, one could refer not only to the origin of this concept with Marx, but also to a great and unbroken tradition in sociological analysis.

It is hard to weigh the pros and cons of the preceding argument rationally; an element of personal preferences will probably enter into any decision. Without trying to argue for this decision, at any length, retaining the concept of class is recommended even in its application to even the most advanced industrial societies. This decision does involve, of course, a polemical stand, against all those who falsify, the term class, by applying it to what should properly be called social

strata. It also involves considerable extensions of the concept as it was used by Marx, as well as by all Marxists. But it emphasizes that in class analysis we are concerned (a) with systematic social conflicts and their structural origin and (b) with one specific type of such conflict.

In terms of our model, the term **class** signifies conflict groups that are generated by the differential distribution of authority in imperatively coordinated associations. This definition implies no assumption as to the looseness or rigidity of their coherence, the presence or absence of a common culture or ideology (beyond specific interests), among their members, and the intensity or lack of intensity of their engagement in social conflicts.

It will be noted that this definition is inconclusive with respect to the differentiation of quasi-groups and interest groups. However, the category of class is a general term for groupings of the kind described more specifically in our model of conflict group formation. For all particular purposes of analysis, it is necessary to abandon this general category in favour of the more specific concepts of quasi-groups and interest groups. The attempt to confine the concept of class to either of these is bound to provoke misunderstandings. Classes like conflict groups indicate an area and type of sociological analysis. Both terms are more useful in compounds such as class analysis, class structure or class conflict than on their own. This is but one further illustration of the essential significance of a terminological dispute about these matters. For purposes of the present study, and without any dogmatic insistence on terms, the alternative 'classes or conflict groups' should be dissolved into the definition 'classes as conflict groups'.

Check Your Progress

4. How do Utopians and Rationalists see conflicting interests in society?
5. How does the integration theory of social structure defines social systems?
6. What is authority?

8.4 SIMMEL'S CONFLICT THEORY

George Simmel's major sociological work, *Soziologie* (1908), is based on a pragmatic structure. He pushes for a structural perspective. Social forms are to be analysed beyond their specific empirical contents and beyond a merely psychological outlook. And if the emphasis on forms comes from a Kantian philosophical tradition, Simmel is equally German in the emphasis he gives to stratification and conflict. Hierarchy ('super-ordination and sub-ordination') is a fundamental topic for Simmel. He treats it early in the book and follows it with an analysis of conflict, so often the concomitant of hierarchy.

Simmel's approach to sociology is ambiguous. He does catch a vision of the structural science of sociology, but this works out largely as a cover for his

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polemical intent to attack the socialistic world view and defend individualism. He believes that socialism is impossible as a modern political ideal because equality is possible only in a small group. It does not come across as a good theoretical point, because it is seen that empirically small groups may be quite authoritarian and hierarchical (think of the patriarchal family) and large-scale societies can certainly approach social equality to some degree. Even if absolute equality is ruled out, economic differences between today's socialist and capitalist societies are substantial.

The example, unfortunately, is all too representative of what Simmel does with his formal approach. His views which are of an allegedly universal and theoretical nature represent mainly his own prejudices. Large groups, he declares, are mindless and authoritarian—hardly an original point but a common charge among the conservatives of his day (elements of this are found in Aristotle's attacks on democracy.) When Simmel discusses the poor, he throws in a section on 'the negative character of collective behaviour'. He speaks of 'the sociological error of socialism and anarchism' as searching for freedom in directions that always bring about domination because large groups must always be hierarchical. When he speaks of coercion, it is in a rather unrealistic fashion; coercion is not the basis of domination, merely something that is sometimes added on to it. Simmel discusses force only in the philosophical context of the doctrine that people have to be coerced to maintain social order. Simmel believes that the majority of people may well need to be coerced into behaving.

The reason that Simmel's content is usually disappointing is that, he is carrying on an underlying polemic almost from beginning to end. The contrast with Weber, who shared many of Simmel's political views, is instructive. Weber really did take his value neutrality seriously. Simmel by comparison seems shallow. The same holds on the empirical side. Even though he fills his pages with examples of different types of groups, they are mainly casual observations, good stories of just the sort that would entertain a dinner party but that are never checked for their truthfulness (e.g., Simmel illustrates the place of numbers in social life by an anecdote of a group of friends who broke a plate into a dozen pieces and each kept one to represent their unity). Or else there are historical examples: the customs and political constitutions of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the New England township, the structure and practices of the medieval papacy. But they remain merely examples. Unlike Weber, Simmel never goes into a comparison of cases nor makes even the most rudimentary effort to see if the preponderance of the evidence is on his side. Instead, he is discontent to provide a colourful illustration for each of his categories.

One point that Simmel is at pains to make is that bourgeois society is the precondition for individualism. He does not put it quite like that: it would be too overtly polemical and not 'formal' enough, but the message comes through nevertheless. The great danger is that the mass society touted by socialists destroys

individualism. What makes individualism possible is a large scale society with considerable internal differentiation. Where individuals are simultaneously members of various groups ('the intersection of social circles') is where individualism flourishes.

That this is part of a specifically bourgeois, capitalist order is made plain in Simmel's other major book, *The Philosophy of Money*. Incidentally, this work is genuinely philosophy, in much the same way that Marx's early economics was simultaneously philosophy. Simmel's reads like almost a direct refutation of Marx (as well as of other economists). Economic value is an objectification produced by separating the individual from the object. Where for Marx this is a definition of alienation, for Simmel it is a positive result, analogous to aesthetic values, which he declares are produced by the same objectifying process. Simmel goes on to argue that this objectification and transcendence of subjectivity is due to the exchange process. Contrary to Marx, exchange value is absolutely central and use value is not economic value at all. Money is a symbol of objectivity that emerges in a relationship among subjective elements, as Simmel remarks, money is analogous to truth itself. He goes on to attack the Marxian labour theory of value. Not only does Marx's theory ignore mental labour in favour of physical, but it emphasizes that physical labour derives its value from the physical effort involved in it.

Simmel's evaluation of money is very much of the positive side. Money allows for anonymity and emotional detachment among persons. It breaks down the omnipresent group controls of traditional society. Money is the basis of individual freedom. This is not to say that Simmel sees nothing negative about modern capitalist society. He expresses his opinions that modern life has become calculating, emotionless, and, hence, characterized by greed, wastefulness, miserliness, cynicism and boredom. Money generates the 'decadent personality type'. Simmel is explicit that the price of modern individualism and freedom is the deracination of personality. On the whole, Simmel is willing to pay the price. He speaks of how personal culture lags behind material culture.

Simmel's views on conflict are contrary to the contentions of the Marxian conflict theorists (and perhaps also the military Realpolitik theorists). For Simmel, conflict does not produce social change; it is merely another structural relationship endemic to any social form. According to him it has something to do with domination, but it does nothing to change the system of domination. It is merely another drama of social life to be appreciated, scarcely more than another salon entertainment.

Check Your Progress

7. How does Simmel see money?
8. Why does Simmel believe socialism is impossible?

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8.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. Although Marx himself never used the term, many Marxists consider Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical source of several strands of Marxism.
2. Marxism is a fundamentally materialist philosophy because its foundation is the belief that the overall account of everything is matter which is the characteristic of reality.
3. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels presented some of their scientific thoughts in combined form. The vital theme of the work was class struggle.
4. For the Utopian, the conflicting interests in society are translated to agreements and for the Rationalist these agreements are an ineffective veneer of conflicts that need to be reconciled by force and constraint.
5. The integration theory of social structure defines social systems as voluntary groupings of people sharing the same values and who establish societies for the effortless striving towards their common goals.
6. Authority is a type of social relation present in each and every social organization and such organizations can be termed as associations.
7. Money allows for anonymity and emotional detachment among persons. It breaks down the omnipresent group controls of traditional society. Money is the basis of individual freedom.
8. Simmel believes that socialism is impossible as a modern political ideal because equality is possible only in a small group.

8.6 SUMMARY

- Although Marx himself never used the term, many Marxists consider Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical source of several strands of Marxism.
- Marxism is a fundamentally materialist philosophy because its foundation is the belief that the overall account of everything is matter which is the characteristic of reality.
- Another important aspect of Marxian analysis is the belief that matter is independent in forming the course of nature which detaches dialectical materialism.
- Marx and Engels began with the impression that everything in reality is a combination of opposites.

- In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels presented some of their scientific thoughts in combined form. The vital theme of the work was class struggle.
- A major school of thought promotes that social order results from a general agreement of values, a *consensus omnium* or *volonte generale* which erases all differences of opinion and interest. Another opinion holds that order in society is based on dominance and violence of a stronger group over another more submissive one.
- Marx subscribed to an image of society of the Rationalist variety. He believed that conflict of interests, domination and exploitation and the consequent revolt against these would lead to change or a new social order. Hence society produces within itself the forces that maintain the very process of change through conflict.
- The Utopian view is apparent in the works of Drucker and Mayo, according to which happy consensus and cooperation is the normal state of social life.
- The integration theory of society perceives social structure in terms of functionally integrated systems held in equilibrium by certain patterned and recurrent processes.
- According to the coercion theory of society on the other hand, social structure is a form of organization bound together by force and constraint. It produces within itself the forces that maintain in it an unending process of change.
- Like the integration model, the coercion theory of society is based on a set of assumptions for purposes of scientific analysis and provides a coherent image of social organization. Analytic conflict theory is not a generalized theory applicable to total societies. It is based upon the analysis of a wide range of social phenomena on the basis of their social location, available resources and options.

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8.7 KEY WORDS

- **Diamat:** It was a social theory coined by the 19th century philosopher Joseph Dietzgen. It emphasized commodities and the effects of their exchange over time. The basic idea of diamat is that every economic order grows to a state of maximum efficiency, while at the same time developing internal contradictions or weaknesses that contribute to its decay.
- **Surplus-Value:** It refers to the new value of a particular product created by a working class individual that is in excess of their own labour costs. Marx stated that this value was appropriated by the capitalist class as gross profit and was the basis of capital accumulation.

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- **Utopians:** It refers to those theorists who believe that order prevails due to consensus and harmony.
- **Rationalists:** It refers to those theorists who believe that order is achieved through domination and constraint.

8.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. What do you understand by the term 'Dialectical Materialism'?
2. Write a short-note on the *Communist Manifesto*.
3. Differentiate between the Utopian and the Rationalist view of society.
4. What are the basic tenets of the coercion theory of society?

Long Answer Questions

1. Examine the three laws of dialectics.
2. Describe the concepts of power and authority.
3. Assess Simmel's conflict theory.
4. Classes like conflict groups indicate an area and type of sociological analysis. Discuss.

8.9 FURTHER READINGS

- Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
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UNIT 9 DIALECTICAL CONFLICT THEORY

NOTES

Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Dialectical Conflict Theory of Dahrendorf
- 9.3 Conflict Functionalism of Lewis Coser
- 9.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.8 Further Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you were introduced to conflict theories. In it, you learnt about Georg Simmel's conflict theory and the relationship between Marxism and conflict theory. In this unit, the discussion will turn towards the theorists of dialectical conflict theory, that is, Ralf Dahrendorf and Louis A. Coser.

The German-British sociologist and philosopher Ralf Dahrendorf is considered an authority on explaining and analyzing class divisions in modern society. He wrote several books on the topic such as *Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959) and *Essays in the Theory of Society* (1968). The core of Dahrendorf's belief was that neither structural functionalism nor Marxism could account for all of society. Marxism did not account for evidence of obvious social integration and cohesion. Structural functionalism, on the other hand, did not focus enough on social conflict.

Louis A. Coser was a German-American sociologist best known for being the first sociologist to try to bring together structural functionalism and conflict theory. He worked alongside Simmel to argue that conflict may be able to help solidify a loosely structured group.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the dialectical conflict theory of Dahrendorf
- Discuss Lewis Coser's conception of conflict in society

9.2 DIALECTICAL CONFLICT THEORY OF DAHRENDORF

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According to Ralf Dahrendorf, conflict is inherent in the dichotomous revision of social organizations into contending categories of roles. In every society, the dialectical model may be found in the dichotomy of opposites such as the ruler and the ruled, the individual and society, the lord and the serf, the elites and the masses, the majority and minority, the conservatives and the liberals, and so on. 'Dialectic sociology' attempts at a systematic study of social conflict involving opposite forces with conflicting interests. Conflict is an unalterable process arising out of the opposing forces within the authority structure. Such conflicts cannot be eliminated by innovations and revolutions. These only introduce new authority structures with new associations, new super-ordinates and sub-ordinates. Thus in fact, innovations and revolutions perpetuate the endless dialectical process of conflict.

Dialectic sociology begins with the society as a whole. It is holistic and argumentative. Dialectic sociology seeks to demonstrate how conflicts are born from structural arrangement and inherent inconsistencies. It does not begin with any specific social problem. It develops into a scientific theory attempting to explain inherent possibilities of the change in society. Dahrendorf attempted to explain the structural origin and the multiplicity of form of conflict in various degrees of intensity.

According to Dahrendorf, 'different modes of structure change, co-vary with different modes of class conflict. The more intense class conflict is, more radical are the changes likely to be which it brings about; the more violent class conflict is, the more sudden are structure changes resulting from it likely to be'. Thus he attends to develop a general theory of class conflict and social change. In his major work, '*Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*', Dahrendorf is concerned with 'the puzzling fact that social structures are capable of producing within themselves the elements of their supersession and change'.

Dahrendorf summarizes his theory in the following propositions:

- (i) Within each group there are individuals with negative and positive dominance leading to two 'quasi groups' with opposite interests that may not be clearly visible.
- (ii) These quasi groups are further organized into concrete groups with clearly defined interests by their respective dominant members or leaders
- (iii) These newly emerged groups tend to conflict with either the preservation of status quo or struggle for change.
- (iv) Such conflict is responsible for changes in the structure of social relations.

According to Dahrendorf, changes in the social structure are the result of conflict between social classes. Social organizations are coordinated associations. There are inherent possibilities of conflict in every social organization. Authority structure involves super-ordinations and sub-ordinations. It prescribes sanctions and enforces conformity. Authority structure defines rights and obligations. There is always a gulf between the rulers and the ruled. The distribution of authority creates two conflict groups of the rulers and the ruled. This is true about every association.

Everywhere there are inherent possibilities of conflict due to the incompatible interests of the rulers and the ruled. Thus, the structure of authority is the basis of conflict. It may be latent or manifest but it cannot be completely eliminated. It may be regulated temporarily. But in order to solve it permanently, the authority structure must be changed. Changes resulting from class conflict ask for changes in the authority system. In revolutions, total or near changes are made in the authority structure. In collisions and class alliances, politics changes are brought about without total exchange of personnel. This is possible only if the ruling group is accommodative and willing to incorporate the proposals of the oppositions as is the case in a parliamentary democracy.

Ralf Dahrendorf developed a theory of class conflict. He defines 'class' in terms of authority. Therefore, class conflict revolves around the struggle for authority. Authority, however, is not the only characteristic of the rulers. Besides it, the ruling class has income, status, prestige, better lifestyle and more material possessions.

The three basic criticisms of Ralf Dahrendorf's theory on social conflict are as follows:

- Its frame of reference is narrow and limited.
- The theory cannot account for all social change.
- Changes in the authority structure not always result in social change.

Check Your Progress

1. What does dialectical sociology seek to demonstrate?
2. How does Dahrendorf define class?

9.3 CONFLICT FUNCTIONALISM OF LEWIS COSER

Lewis Coser purified Simmel by eliminating the anti-socialist polemics and keeping those principles that have wide-ranging applications to all kinds of conflicts. Conflict sharpens the sense of group boundaries. Conflict is most intense when it breaks out between individuals or groups who are already closely related, because then it is most threatening to the group. External conflict brings a group together more

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cohesively; for this reason, groups often search for external enemies in order to maintain internal order. Ironically, antagonists become bound to one another, much as in an arms race the militarists on both sides owe their influence to each other. Conflicts tend to spread by the process through which each side tries to bring a neutral party into a coalition.

Coser's formulation of these principles began a modern school of research on the process of conflict itself. Coser's work appeared at about the same time as Dahrendorf's theory of class conflict. Sociologists believed that the combination of the two could evolve into a conflict theory.

According to Lewis Coser, 'Conflict prevents the ossification of the social system by exerting pressure for innovation and creativity'. Conflict leads to elimination of the sources of conflict between parties. It expresses hostility but mends strained relationships. It redresses the grievances by the establishment of new bonds in place of old ones. It unifies the ingroup through hostility towards the outgroup. Deviation from the group norms is severely condemned during conflicts with the outgroup. Thus, social conflict creates a lot of advantages such as generation of new norms and institutions, formation of new coalitions and alliances, technological improvements, revitalization of economy, social facilitation, release of tension and frustration and social reorganization. Summing up the advantages of conflict in society, Coser writes, 'Conflict within and between groups in a society can prevent accommodations and habitual relations from progressively impoverishing creativity. The clash of values and interests, the tension between what is and what some groups feel ought to be, the conflict between vested interests and new strata and groups demanding their share of power, wealth and status, have been productive of vitality; note for example the contrast between the 'frozen world of the Middle Ages and the burst of creativity that accompanied the thaw that set in with Renaissance civilization'.

In his book entitled, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Lewis Coser suggested the following propositions concerning the intensity and impact of conflict in society:

- (i) Conflicts are positively functional for the social structure if they concern goals, values and interests that do not contradict the basic assumptions behind the relationship.
- (ii) When the two contending parties do not share the basic values which determine the legitimacy of the social system, it leads to a conflict that disturbs the social structure.
- (iii) The conflict is more intense if the groups are closer. In such a situation suppressed conflicts are detrimental to the relationship.
- (iv) When the group members are not totally involved, but only participate partially, it results in a multiplicity of conflicts.
- (v) When the social structures are not rigid, multiple conflicts occur. Hence there is no one main basis on which the group breaks. In that sense the

crisscrossing numerous conflicts tend to balance the structure and prevent it from breaking on one disruptive basis.

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- (vi) In open societies where the antagonists/ contending parties strive for a resolution, it stabilizes and integrates the social structure.
- (vii) Conflicts are tolerated in different societies to different extents. At the same time societies sometimes attempt to channelize discontent by providing substitute objects on which hostility can be displaced. These are like 'safety valves'.
- (viii) The more rigid the social structure the greater the need for safety valves.

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Check Your Progress

- 3. According to Coser, what does conflict prevent?
- 4. When is conflict most intense?

9.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

- 1. Dialectic sociology seeks to demonstrate how conflicts are born from structural arrangement and inherent inconsistencies.
- 2. Ralf Dahrendorf developed a theory of class conflict. He defines 'class' in terms of authority.
- 3. According to Lewis Coser, 'Conflict prevents the ossification of the social system by exerting pressure for innovation and creativity'.
- 4. Conflict is most intense when it breaks out between individuals or groups who are already closely related, because then it is most threatening to the group.

9.5 SUMMARY

- The German-British sociologist and philosopher Ralf Dahrendorf is considered an authority on explaining and analyzing class divisions in modern society.
- Louis A. Coser was a German-American sociologist best known for being the first sociologist to try to bring together structural functionalism and conflict theory.
- According to Ralf Dahrendorf, conflict is inherent in the dichotomous revision of social organizations into contending categories of roles.
- Dahrendorf attempted to explain the structural origin and the multiplicity of form of conflict in various degrees of intensity.

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- According to Dahrendorf, changes in the social structure are the result of conflict between social classes.
- Social organizations are coordinated associations. There are inherent possibilities of conflict in every social organization. Authority structure involves super-ordinations and sub-ordinations.
- Lewis Coser purified Simmel by eliminating the anti-socialist polemics and keeping those principles that have wide-ranging applications to all kinds of conflicts.
- Conflict within and between groups in a society can prevent accommodations and habitual relations from progressively impoverishing creativity.

9.6 KEY WORDS

- **Dialectic sociology:** The theory that seeks to demonstrate how conflicts are born from structural arrangement and inherent inconsistencies.
- **Safety Valves:** It refers to a means of giving harmless vent to feelings of tension or stress in a society.

9.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on dialectic sociology.
2. List the basic criticisms of Ralf Dahrendorf's theory on social conflict.

Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss the propositions given by Coser concerning the impact and intensity of conflict in society.
2. Critically analyse Dahrendorf's theory of conflict.

9.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 10 ALTHUSSER AND HABERMAS

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 - 10.2.1 The Public Sphere
 - 10.2.2 The Theory of Communicative Action
- 10.3 Louis Althusser: Structural Marxism
 - 10.3.1 The Epistemological Break
 - 10.3.2 Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses
 - 10.3.3 Material Existence
- 10.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.8 Further Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will first discuss the theories of Habermas. Jurgen Habermas is considered as one of the most influential thinkers from Germany in the twentieth century. He was profoundly affected by the World War II in his early teens. After the fall of Nazism, the future of Germany became bright and optimistic, however Habermas was disappointed with the lack of dramatic progress after the war. Due to the end of Nazism, all kinds of intellectual opportunities became available for Habermas, including Western and German literature, as well as texts written by Marx and Engels. He went on to become an important philosopher in the tradition of critical theory and pragmatism. He is perhaps best known for his theories on communicative rationality and the public sphere.

The unit will go on to discuss the theories of Althusser. It is almost impossible to completely understand the functioning of a capitalist society and the Marxist critical theory without understanding the theories of Louis Althusser. Marxism, as an ever-inspiring and ever-evolving concept, got a new lease of life with the contributions made by Althusser. His ideas inspired and influenced a wide range of sociologists after him. Several thinkers, (like Luke and Ferreter) are of the opinion that the complexities implicit in the capitalist society can only be understood by going through Althusser's writings.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of public sphere as interpreted by Habermas
- Explain Habermas's concept of social evolution
- Discuss Althusser's epistemological break from Marxism
- Explain Althusser's concepts of ideology and ideological state apparatuses

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10.2 HABERMAS: LIFE WORLD AND SYSTEM

Habermas became associated with the Institute for Social Research in the Frankfurt School in 1956. From the beginning, he demonstrated an independent intellectual orientation. During that time, a 1957 article by Habermas got him into trouble, however the article was eventually published.

Habermas became a privatozent and completed his 'habilitation' at the University of Marburg in 1961. Habermas, was recommended for a professorship of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg, even before he had completed his habilitation. He then moved to the University of Frankfurt as the professor of philosophy and sociology. He was the director of the Marx Plank Institute from 1971 to 1981. Habermas has won numerous academic prizes and has been awarded honorary professorships at several universities.

For many years, Habermas was the world's leading neo-Marxist. However, over the years his work has broadened to involve many different theoretical inputs. Marx focused on work, whereas Habermas is concerned mainly with communication, which he considers to be a more general process than work. Marx sought a future world with creative labour, whereas Habermas seek a future world characterized by open and free communication. Therefore, there are some startling similarities between the theories of Marx and Habermas.

Due to his faith in the future, Habermas is considered apart from many leading contemporary thinkers, such as Jean Baudrillard and other postmodernists. While, other postmodernists reject the possibility of creating grand narratives, Habermas continues his work and support his most notable grand theory in modern social theory. If Habermas, came out victorious, he may be viewed as the saviour of the modernist project.

Jurgen Habermas has been an enormously productive scholar in the past two decades. Moreover, to be kind about the matter, Habermas's style of exposition is somewhat dense. Part of this denseness is his style of prose, but much of it is Habermas's Germanic approach, which involves an effort to analyse all the relevant viewpoints on a topic before he presents his case. As a result, Habermas's main

line of argument is often buried in tangential analysis of scholars and issues that he perceives to be relevant and essential to his point.

10.2.1 The Public Sphere

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In his first major publication *Structure Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas traces the evolution and dissolution of what he termed as the public sphere. This sphere is a realm of social life where people can bring up matters of general interest; where they can discuss and debate these issues without recourse to custom, dogma, and force; and where they can resolve differences of opinion by rational argument. Increasingly throughout his career, Habermas sees emancipation from domination as possible through ‘communicative action’, which is a reincarnation of the public sphere in more conceptual clothing.

In this early work, however, Habermas appears more interested in history and views the emergence of the public sphere as occurring in the 18th century, when various forums for public debate—clubs, cafes, journals, newspapers—proliferated. He concluded that these forums helped erode the basic structure of feudalism, which is legitimated by religion and custom rather than by agreements that have been reached through public debate and discourse. The public sphere was greatly expanded, Habermas of the individual from the constraints of feudalism. Free citizen property holders, traders, merchants and members of other new sectors in society could now be actively concerned about the governance of society and could openly discuss and debate issues. However, in a vein similar to Weber’s analysis of rationalization, Habermas argues that the public sphere was eroded by some of the very forces that stimulated its expansion. As market economies experiences instability, the powers of the state are extended in an effort to stabilize the economy: and with the expansion of bureaucracy to even more contexts of social life, the public sphere is constricted. And increasingly, the state seeks to redefine problems as technical and soluble by technologies and administrative procedure rather than by public debate and argumentation.

The Critique of Science

In his *The logic of the Social Sciences and knowledge and Human Interest*, Habermas analyses systems of knowledge in an effort to elaborate a framework for critical theory. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to establish the fact that science is but one type of knowledge that exists in order to meet only one set of human interests. To realize this goal, Habermas posits three basic types of knowledge that encompass the full range of human reason. They are as follows:

1. There is ‘empirical analytic knowledge’, which are those types of knowledge concerned with understanding the lawful properties of the material world.
2. There is ‘hermeneutic—historical knowledge’, which is devoted to understanding of meanings, especially through the interpretation of historical texts.

3. There is 'critical knowledge' which is devoted to uncovering conditions of constraint and domination.

These three types of knowledge reflect three basic types of human interests, such as the following:

1. A 'technical' interest in the reproduction of existence through control of the environment.
2. A 'practical' interest in understanding the meaning of situations.
3. An 'emancipator' interest in freedom for growth and improvement. Such interest do not reside in individual, but in more general imperative for reproduction, meaning, and freedom that presumably are built into the species as it has become organized into societies.

These three interests create, therefore, three types of knowledge. The interest in material reproduction has produced science or empirical/analytic knowledge; the interest in understanding of meaning has led to the development of hermeneutic/historical knowledge; and the interest in freedom has required the development of critical theory.

These interest in technical control, practical understanding, and emancipation generate different types of knowledge through three types of media, such as the following:

1. 'Work' for realizing interests in technical control through the development of empirical/analytical knowledge.
2. 'Language' for realizing practical interests in understanding through hermeneutic knowledge.
3. 'Authority' for realizing interests in emancipation through the development of critical theory.

There is a kind of factionalism in this analysis: needs for 'material survival and social reproduction', for 'continuity of society through interpretive understanding and for 'utopian fulfilment' create interests. Then, through the media of work, language and authority, these needs produce three types of knowledge: the scientific, hermeneutical and critical.

This kind of etymologizing is, of course, reminiscent of Weber and Parson; and in many ways it is even vaguer than Parson's typologizing. Nonetheless, it is the vehicle through which Habermas makes the central point: Positivism and the search for natural laws is only one type of knowledge, although the historical trend has been for the empirical/analytic to dominate the other two types of knowledge. Thus, interests in technical control through work and the development of science have dominated the interests in understanding and emancipation. And so, if social life seems meaningless and cold, it is because technical interests in producing science have come to dictate what kind of knowledge is permissible and legitimate.

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This typology allows Habermas to achieve several goals. First, he can attack the assumption that science is value free because, like all knowledge, it is attached to a set of interests. Second, he can revise the Weber and thesis of rationalization in such a way that it dictates a renewed emphasis on hermeneutics and criticism. For it is these other types of knowledge. Third, he can justify certain topic areas that come to consume his work.

Legitimation Crises in Society

As Habermas's earlier work had argued, there are several historical trends in modern societies, such as the following:

- The limits of the public sphere.
- The increasing intervention of the state into the economy, and
- The growing dominance of science in the service of state's interests in technical control.

These ideas are woven together in 'legitimation crisis', which we see as a further critique of capitalist society and positivistic science.

The basic argument in 'legitimation crisis' is that as the state increasingly intervenes in the economy, it also seeks to translate political issues into 'technical problems'. Issues are not topics for public debate but rather, they represent technical problems that require the use of technologies by experts in bureaucratic organizations. As a result, there is a 'depoliticization' of practical issues by redefining them as technical problems. To do this, the state propagates a 'technocratic consciousness' that, to Habermas, represents a new kind of ideology. Unlike previous ideologies, it is seductive in its ability to veil problems, to simplify perceived options, and to justify a particular way of organizing social life. At the core of this technocratic consciousness is an emphasis on 'instrumental reason', or what Weber termed 'mean-ends rationality'. That is, criteria of the efficiency of means in realizing explicit goals increasingly come to guide evaluations of social action and people's approach to problems. This emphasis on instrumental reason operates to displace other types of actions, such as behaviours oriented to mutual understanding. This displacement occurs in a series of stages: Science is first used by the state to realize specific goals; then, the criterion of efficiency is used by the state to reconcile competing goals of groupings; next, basic cultural values are themselves assessed and evaluated in terms of their efficiency and rationality; and finally, in Habermas's version of 'Brave New World', decisions are completely delegated to computers, which seek the most rational and efficient course of action.

This reliance on the ideology of technocratic consciousness creates, Habermas argues, new dilemmas of political legitimation. For Habermas, capitalist societies can be divided into three basic subsystems. They are as follows:

- The economic
- The politico-administrative
- The cultural

From this division of societies into these subsystem, Habermas then posits four points of crisis, such as follows:

1. An 'economic crisis' occurs if the economic subsystem cannot generate a sufficient productivity to meet people's needs.
2. A 'rationality crisis' exists when the politics-administrative subsystem cannot generate a sufficient number of instrumental decisions.
3. A 'motivation crisis' exists when actors cannot use cultural symbols to generate sufficient meaning for them to feel committed to participate fully in the society.
4. A 'legitimation crisis' arises when actors do not possess the 'requisite number of generalized motivation' or diffuse commitments to the political subsystem's right to make decisions.

Much of this analysis of crises is couched in Marxian terms, but emphasizes that economic and legitimation crisis. For as technocratic consciousness penetrates all spheres of social life and creates productive economies as well as an intensive state, the crisis tendencies of late capitalism shift from the inability to produce sufficient economic goods or political decisions to the failure to generate (a) diffuse commitments to political processes and (b) adequate levels of meaning among individual actors.

Speech and Interaction Analysis

In 1970, Habermas wrote two articles that marked a return to the idea of the public sphere, but with a new, more theoretical thrust. They also signalled an increasing emphasis on the process of speech, communication and interaction. In his 'On Systematically Distorted Communication' Habermas outlines the nature of undistorted communication. The goal is to determine the essentials and essence of undistorted communication so that those processes that distort communication, such as domination, can be better exposed. Habermas lists five features of undistorted communication, such as follows:

1. Expressions, actions and gestures are non-contradictory.
2. Communication is public and conforms to cultural standards of what is appropriate
3. Actors can distinguish between the properties of language, per se, and the events and processes that are described by language;
4. Communication lead to, and is the product of, inter-subjectivity, or the capacity of actors to understand each other's subjective states and to develop as sense of shared collective meanings. And
5. Conceptualization of time and space are understood by actors to mean different things when externally observed and when subjectively experienced in the process of interaction.

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Thus, in the early 1970s, Habermas began to view the mission of critical theory as emphasizing the process of interaction as mediated by speech. However, such speech acts draw upon stores of knowledge rules, norms, values, tacit understandings, memory traces, and the like—for their interpretation. ‘What is good and desirable’ in more theoretical and conceptual terms, although it could be argued that there is not much difference between the romanticized portrayed of the public sphere and the ideal-typical conceptualization of speech. However, with this conceptualization, the goal of critical theory must be to expose those conditions that distort communication and that inhibit realization of the ideal speech situation. Communication involves more than words, grammar, and syntax; it also involves what Habermas terms ‘validity claims’. There are three type of claims, such as follows:

1. Those asserting that a course of actions as indicated through speech is the most effective and efficient means for attaining ends.
2. Those claiming that an action is correct and proper in accordance with relevant norms
3. Those maintaining that the subjective experience as expressed in a speech act are sincere and authentic.

All speech acts implicitly make these three claims, although a speech act may emphasize one more than the other two. Those responding to communication can accept or challenge these validity claims, and if challenged then the actors contest, debate, criticize, and revise their communication. They use, of course, shared ‘stocks of knowledge’ about norms, means end and revise them. If claims are settled by the ‘giving for reason for’ and ‘reason against’ the claim in a mutual give-and-take among individuals then Habermas sees it as ‘rational discourse’.

Habermas’ Concept of Social Evolution

Habermas produces a historical–evolutionary analysis, but in contrast to Max Weber, he needs to see emancipator potential in evolutionary trends. Habermas’s first major effort to effect this reconciliation appears in his ‘The Reconstruction of Historical Materialism’, parts of which have been translated and appear in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. As with all functional theory, he views evolution as the process of structural differentiation and the emergence of integrative problems. He also borrows a page from Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parson, and Nikolas Lukmann when he argues that the integration of complex system leads to an adaptive upgrading, increasing the capacity of the society to cope with the environment. That is, complex systems that are integrated are better adapted to their environment than less complex systems. The key issue, then, is what conditions increase or decrease integration? For without integration, differentiation produces serve problems. Thus, as systems confront problems of internal integration and external contingencies, the stocks of knowledge and world views of individual actors are translated into organization principles and steering

capacities, which in turn, set limits on just how a system can respond. For example, a society with only religious mythology will be less complex one with large stores of technology and stocks of normative procedure determining its organization principles and steering mechanisms, they can draw upon the ‘cognitive potential’ in the world views and stocks of knowledge of individual who reorganize their actions. The result of this learning creates new levels of information that allow for the development of new organization principles for securing integration in the face of increased societal differentiation and complex city.

10.2.2 The Theory of Communicative Action

In volume one of ‘*The Theory of communicative Action*’, Habermas undertakes a long and detailed analysis of Weber’s conceptualization of action and rationalization. He does so because he wants to reconceptualise rationality and action in ways that allow him to view rational action as a potentially liberating rather than as an imprisoning force. There are several different types of action. They are as follows:

- **Teleological action:** Teleological action is behaviour oriented to calculating various means and selecting the most appropriate means to realize explicit goals. Such action becomes strategic when other acting agents are involved in one’s calculations. Habermas also called this action ‘instrumental’ because it is concerned with means to achieve ends.
- **Normatively regulated action:** Normatively regulated action is behaviour that is oriented to common values of a group. Thus, normative action is directed toward complying with normative expectations of collectively organized groupings of individuals.
- **Dramaturgical action:** Dramaturgical action is action that involves conscious manipulation of oneself before an audience or public. It is ego-centered in that it involves actors mutually manipulating their behaviour to present their own intentions, but it is also social in that such manipulation is done in the context of organized activity.
- **Communicative action:** Communicative action is interaction among agents who use speech and non-verbal symbols as a way of understanding their mutual situation and their respective plans of action in order that they can agree on how to coordinate their behaviours.

These four types of action presuppose different kinds of ‘worlds’. That is, each action is oriented to a somewhat different aspect of the universe that can be divided into the (i) ‘objective or external world’ of manipulable objects (ii) ‘Social world’ of norms, values, and other socially recognized expectations and (iii) ‘Subjective world’ of experience. Teleological action is concerned primarily with the objective world. Normatively regulated action with the social, and dramaturgical with the subjective and external. However, it is only with communicative actions that actors refer simultaneously to things in the objective,

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social and subjective worlds in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation.

The last observation of Habermas approach is that there is a kind of naïve romanticism in all of his work, from his first discussion of the public sphere to the present. He employs a totally artificial yardstick of undistorted communication, then one on the ideal speech situation, and finally the criterion of communicative action—for assessing what’s wrong with modern societies. When one brings the analysis of human social organization with a set of standards that, we suspect, have never been met in human affairs, then one’s interpretation of events will be rather dramatically obscured.

Check Your Progress

1. Mention the differences between the theories of Marx and Habermas.
2. What are the three basic types of human interests?
3. List the different types of action according to Habermas.

10.3 LOUIS ALTHUSSER: STRUCTURAL MARXISM

Louis Pierre Althusser was a French thinker who was born in 1918 and died in 1990. He was a devout Christian who initially found fame for setting up a religious movement for the students. He was imprisoned during World War II in a Nazi War camp, but the leisure time available there provided him with ample opportunities to get involved in some serious writings which brought him closer to the idea of communism.

However, the imprisoned period of his life brought about stages of mental instability as well. He is known to have spent around 15 years of his life under psychiatric treatment. The worst part of this phase was that he killed his wife in one of his fits of depression. At last, he was released from all criminal charges on authentic grounds and after a couple of years, he passed away in 1990.

Stature in Marxism

Marxism, as a theory, has seen evolution and depletion of several philosophical trends. One of the most prominent examples is the popularity of Soviet Socialist Realism that led to Frankfurt Literature, which ultimately eroded all possibilities of Realism. Due to these variations in different contextual understandings of Marxism, Althusser is studied along with several other thinkers of 60s who dealt with the impacts and influences of Marxist criticism and as a result, were influenced by a new analytic movement known as Structuralism.

Althusser has never himself asserted his labelling as a structuralist, though his prominent works are still read under the mantle of Structuralism. His prime objective was to deny the revival of Hegelian idealism through readings of Marxism.

Rather, he attempted to understand Marxism as independent from Hegelianism. Althusser's works are a critique of the totalitarianism (present in the Hegelian dialectic), which implied that the whole can be understood in all of its parts. On the other hand, he emphasized that the social formations, as structures, should not be seen as an overall unity or as central governing principle.

Association with Marxism

The prominent Marxism text *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844* caught attention of many prominent philosophers of the time including Sartre and Calvez. The critique of capitalism and emphasis on the humanist language made a widespread impact in philosophy. Such a humanist interpretation of the Marxist text became the prime objective for Althusser's works. He found the materialist understanding of history as a more plausible way of looking at the things.

According to this theory, the human society may be bifurcated into substructure and superstructure - while the substructure or the base includes all legal and political institutions, the superstructure or the top is purely an ideology. The cultural criticism offered by Althusser is far more inclined towards the materialist understanding of history, since it attempts to understand a particular work in society only in the backdrop of precise forces of the time.

10.3.1 The Epistemological Break

In his work *For Marx*, Althusser has argued that the Marxian views were not coherent in their different writings. In books like *The German Ideology* and *Thesis on Feuerbach*, Marx has completely left the notion of humanism that was prevalent in all of his earlier works. Rather, Marx's later works expound the notion of ideologies, social formations and relationship of production as the new grounds for theorizing history and politics in a subtle manner.

Here, the epistemology break refers to the theory of knowledge and the break represents the gap between the dominant thoughts found in the works of Marx. The rupture between humanism and its relevant philosophies and materialist understanding of history led to a completely new form of knowledge and in this way, could rightly be called 'the epistemological break'. In his famous text entitled *For Marx*, Althusser has used this term for the first time with reference to the famous French thinker Gaston Bachelard.

Althusser's Works

Most of the thinkers are of the opinion that the entire collection of Althusser's work may be conveniently divided in five distinct phases of his life as follows:

- (i) **The First phase:** This phase consists of Althusser's works between 1946 and 1951. All of these reflect a shift from the conventional Catholic beliefs to the theory of Communism and from Hegelian approach to the Marxist approach. Some of the prominent works in this phase were collected in 1953 with the name *The Spectre of Hegel*.

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- (ii) **The Second phase:** This phase consists of Althusser's works between 1952 and 1966. All of these represent the most conducive period of his life, which led to many influential works such as *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (1965). These works communicate the basic principles of the science of history as proposed by Marx himself.
- (iii) **The Third phase:** This phase consists of Althusser's works between 1967 and 1975 and represents his withdrawal from his earlier position. In this phase, he attempted to understand philosophy as 'the class struggle in theory'. Some of the prominent works in this period were *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (1967), *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971) and *Essays in Self Criticism* (1976).
- (iv) **The Fourth phase:** This phase consists of Althusser's works between 1976 and 1978. This phase represented Althusser's intense dissatisfaction with the practice of theory prevalent in the Communist Party of that time. That is why, in his works, he raised his voice for a reinterpretation of Marxism. Some of the major works of this period were 'On the 22nd Congress of the French Communist Party' (1977), 'The Crisis of Marxism' (1977), *What Must Change in the Party* (1978), and *Marxism Today* (1978).
- (v) **The Fifth phase:** This phase takes into account Althusser's considerations for the notion of 'chance' in the functioning of history. This period represents a new interpretation of materialism which indicates that history is not a necessary process but an outcome of chance encounters.

In a nutshell, it can be said that Althusser's collection of works radically changed the way literary studies were made in those times. Before the new interpretations provided by him, the critical approach (prevalent in America and Britain) tended to 'exclude the literary from the political'. But his theories provided us a new approach of looking at the function of literary in the society. His works gave several indications of radically reframing the literary criticism with reference to science and politics. His works are immensely useful to understand the role of social and political commitments in the field of contemporary criticism. His principle made a significant influence on the theories of new historicism, cultural materialism, feminism, post-colonial theory and queer theory.

In order to understand Althusser's conception of ideological state apparatuses, it seems inevitable to present a brief discussion on the significance of Marx and Engels in philosophy. Marx's materialist understanding of history proposed that a society is composed of the relation of production and the forces of material lives. Both, Marx and Engels, argued that this economic base provides the substratum for the emergence of superstructures in the society. These superstructures represent cultural, political, legal and literary institutions of the time. They established that the human history is nothing but a constant struggle among different opposite classes and every ideology is nothing but a 'deliberately constructed discourse' so as to satisfy the vested interests of the ruling class.

10.3.2 Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses

One of the most significant and widely discussed essays of Althusser, published in 1970, was 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. It was a compilation of several parts taken from his works on the reproduction of relations of production. This work explains and elaborates the relations of productions which are reproduced by societies and thereby, work as criterion for their functioning. The continuous exploitation of one class by the other, time-and-again, is investigated by Althusser in this work and he tries to find the answer to this in his theory of ideological state apparatuses.

Almost all versions of Marxism have always considered the State as such an apparatus which suppresses and exploits lower class and reaffirms the superiority of already dominant class through various state apparatuses such as government, judiciary, bureaucracy, police, prison, etc. However, this explanation of the State-functions has been considered as 'an oversimplified explanation' by Althusser. According to him, the state apparatus is far more subtle, complicated and consists of unique yet overlapping institutions. It is of two types as follows:

- (a) **Repressive State Apparatus (RSA):** It refers to all those institutions which Marxism has already identified. The deliberate use of the 'repressive' indicates the characteristic of violent repression inherent in its very nature and functions.
- (b) **Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA):** It refers to family, political, communicative Ideological State Apparatuses etc.

These two state apparatuses are fundamentally different from each-other on the basis of their nature and functions. While Repressive State Apparatus is violent in nature, Ideological State Apparatuses is ideological and non-repressive in nature. According to Althusser, 'Repressive State Apparatus functions predominantly by repression (including physical repression), while secondarily by ideology (there is no such thing as purely repressive apparatuses)... Ideological State Apparatuses function predominantly by ideology but secondarily by repression (there is no such thing as purely ideological apparatuses).'

Structural Causality and Structure of Dominance

The Repressive State Apparatus tries to retain the economic superiority of the dominant class through various activities such as force, violence or coercion. People are often compelled to perform certain actions by the use of direct force, by State institutions such as judiciary, military and police. On the other hand, the Ideological State Apparatuses functions through a discourse on ideology. The process of suppression and surrender to certain rules and processes that ensure the superior position of a few dominant classes gets naturalized by apparatuses to be family, religion, school etc. Though the institutions participating Ideological State Apparatuses seem to be quite distinct from each-other, still their unified objective of functioning through yet rearticulating the ideology of the dominant class.

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In the above-mentioned context, Althusser proposed his revolutionary idea where he envisioned such an ideological state apparatus which not only communicates the ruling ideology, but also structures and defends ideology of the exploited class. In addition, Althusser explains how religious and theological discussions in the pre-capitalist era have functioned through the religion (Church) as the dominant Ideological State Apparatuses. In due course of time, when the bourgeoisie class became the new economic power, the dominant Ideological State Apparatuses shifted its centre from Church to educational institutions. This is why, all ideological operations which were earlier performed by the Church are now shifted to the field of education.

Althusser is of the opinion that the dominant ideology of the pre-capitalist times was disseminated through institutions like family and religion. However, in the later times, family started with the educational system for training people in techniques, traditions and discourses. The credit goes to Althusser for identifying the significance of Ideological State Apparatuses for teaching and training people of all age-groups as per the roles expected from them in the society, thus maintaining *status quo*.

10.3.3 Material Existence

In this essay, Althusser attempts to establish again and again that every ideology is not simply a phenomena existing and operating within the boundaries of human mind. Instead, every ideology possesses material existence in the sense that though ideas precede actions; its ideology is prevalent in the practices of the institution (in a subtle form). He attempts to investigate the possible reasons behind specific beliefs of people in specific Ideological State Apparatuses. It is these beliefs which, in turn, are realized by the institutions and thus, become the material apparatuses. In this way, Althusser is of the opinion that the ideas are nothing but an outcome of certain situations of individuals within some ideological apparatuses of the society.

Interpellation

The above mentioned discussion by Althusser indicates that the ideas and beliefs are not an outcome of certain situations of individuals but of Ideological State Apparatuses. He also established the idea of change from an individual to a subject through the functioning of an ideology. According to him, this takes place only when an ideology interpellates an individual. Interpellation is a French term which means 'to interrogate' or 'to call out'. It is believed that human-beings are autonomous individuals with their own specific set of beliefs, thoughts and actions. However, Althusser believes that it is not the individual, who decides his actions, but on the contrary, it is practice and actions that constitute individuals. As such, the notion of an autonomous, self-defining individual is nothing but an ideological concept for him.

He further adds that this ideology and politics function in such a way so as to create an illusion of exclusive and autonomous identity in all individuals, thus

making them believe in a false reality through interpellation of ideologies. In this false reality, people want to believe that they have complete control of their identity and existence, but Althusser says that the reality lies in a complicated set of socio-economic practices where the individual is inserted even before he is born. In this way, humans are 'called into' being as the subjects of ideology. For example, in a patriarchal society, even an unborn baby gets a father's name. In a religious institution, followers are made to believe in God and people start defining their lives by this.

Althusser is of the opinion that this interpellation of subjects influenced by some or other ideology operates by establishing a supreme subject as the absolute model for all others to identify with and follow. For instance, in the Religious Ideological State Apparatuses, the absolute subject of God works as the model to shape the lives and experiences of the religious people (Christians). This absolute model provides the ground on the basis of which other subjects stand and act. These other subjects act as the real subjects with reference to their obligation and obedience towards the absolute. Such obedience takes away all kinds of freedom and autonomy of their existence. In this way, the Ideological State Apparatuses subjugate the people and make them unresisting in nature without use of violence in any form.

This politics of interpellation is prevalent in the whole system and thereby, manipulates the people to function as subjects 'all by themselves'. In this way, they unknowingly become associated with a particular ideology and are conditioned in such a way that they refuse to question its practices or find any fault in it. According to Althusser, '...the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to commandments to the subject'. In other words, the subjects make and accept the gesture of their subjugation and 'work all by themselves'.

Luke Ferreter comments that Althusser has proved how the dominant class determines the ideology of the whole society, nevertheless he has also indicated that the dominated class may also construct (its own) ideology in order to express their protest against domination. Althusser has called it 'the Proletariat Ideology' (or the *petit-bourgeois* ideology).

This essay reaches its culmination by providing a ray of hope for the possibility of protest against Christian ideology. This may be done only by motivating the people to accept that the society is composed of several antagonistic classes based on subject-to-subject interrelations. Such an acceptance assists people to question the prevalence of a dominant ideology and search for their own ideology.

The possibility of such realization is proposed in Althusser's comment that Ideological State Apparatuses are not simplistic platforms for the operations of the dominant ideology, but are also the platforms of constant class-struggles between ruling class and the ruled class and even between the former ruling class and the current ruling class. As such, it can be conceived as a vibrant platform for complex interplay and struggle between different classes for acquisition of power.

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Althusser emphasizes that such power-clashes do have an affirmative role in the society as it is only when the people realize and identify with the significance of these power-struggles that any kind of resistance against the dominant Ideological State Apparatuses becomes possible.

Check Your Progress

4. What argument does Althusser put forth in his work *For Marx*?
5. What is a Repressive State Apparatus?

10.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Marx focused on work, whereas Habermas is concerned mainly with communication, which he considers to be a more general process than is work. While Marx sought a future world involving full and creative labour, Habermas seeks a future society characterized by free and open communication.
2. The three basic types of human interests are as follows:
 - A 'technical' interest in the reproduction of existence through control of the environment.
 - A 'practical' interest in understanding the meaning of situations.
 - An 'emancipator' interest in freedom for growth and improvement. Such interest do not reside in individual, but in more general imperative for reproduction, meaning, and freedom that presumably are built into the species as it has become organized into societies.
3. The different types of action are as follows:
 - Teleological action
 - Normatively regulated action
 - Dramaturgical action
 - Communicative action
4. In his work *For Marx*, Althusser has argued that the Marxian views were not coherent in their different writings. In books like *The German Ideology* and *Thesis on Feuerbach*, Marx has completely left the notion of humanism that was prevalent in all of his earlier works.
5. Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) refers to all those institutions which Marxism has already identified. The deliberate use of the 'repressive' indicates the characteristic of violent repression inherent in its very nature and functions. Repressive State Apparatus functions predominantly by

repression (including physical repression), while secondarily by ideology (there is no such thing as purely repressive apparatuses).

Althusser and Habermas

10.5 SUMMARY

- Habermas became associated with the Institute for Social Research in the Frankfurt School in 1956.
- Habermas became a privatdozent and completed his ‘habilitation’ at the University of Marburg in 1961.
- Jürgen Habermas has been an enormously productive scholar in the past two decades.
- In his first major publication *Structure Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas traces the evolution and dissolution of what he termed as the public sphere.
- In this early work, however, Habermas appears more interested in history and views the emergence of the public sphere as occurring in the 18th century, when various forums for public debate—clubs, cafes, journals, newspapers—proliferated.
- The public sphere was greatly expanded, Habermas of the individual from the constraints of feudalism.
- In his *The Logic of the Social Sciences and Knowledge and Human Interest*, Habermas analyses systems of knowledge in an effort to elaborate a framework for critical theory.
- The basic argument in ‘legitimation crisis’ is that as the state increasingly intervenes in the economy, it also seeks to translate political issues into ‘technical problems’.
- For Habermas, capitalist societies can be divided into three basic subsystems. They are as follows:
 - The economic
 - The politico-administrative
 - The cultural
- In 1970, Habermas wrote two articles that marked a return to the idea of the public sphere, but with a new, more theoretical thrust.
- Habermas produces a historical–evolutionary analysis, but in contrast to Weber, he needs to see emancipator potential in evolutionary trends.
- Habermas’s first major effort to effect this reconciliation appears in his ‘The Reconstruction of Historical Materialism’, parts of which have been translated and appear in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*.

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- In volume one of ‘*The Theory of communicative Action*’, Habermas undertakes a long and detailed analysis of Weber’s conceptualization of action and rationalization.
- In order to fully understand the functioning of a capitalist society and the Marxist critical theory, reading the theories of Louis Althusser is mandatory. His ideas inspired and influenced a wide range of sociologists after him.
- In his work *For Marx*, Althusser has argued that the Marxian views were not coherent in different writings. He envisions the materialist understanding of history as such a science from which all other systems of knowledge emerge and that is why this transformation in the Marxian thoughts are called ‘the epistemological break’ by Althusser. Here, the epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and the break represents the gap between the dominant thoughts found in the works of Marx.
- The rupture between humanism and its relevant philosophies and materialist understanding of history led to a completely new form of knowledge and in this way, it could rightly be called ‘the epistemological break’. In his famous text entitled *For Marx*, Althusser has used this term for the first time. Most of the thinkers are of the opinion that the entire collection of Althusser work may be conveniently divided in five distinct phases of life.
- It can be said that Althusser’s collection of works radically changed the way literary studies were made in those times. His theories provided us a new approach of looking at the function of literary in the society. His works gave several indications of radically reframing the literary criticism with reference to science and politics. His principle made a significant influence on the theories of new historicism, cultural materialism, feminism, post-colonial theory and queer theory.
- Almost all versions of Marxism have always considered the State as such an apparatus which suppresses and exploits lower class and reaffirms the superiority of already dominant class through various state apparatuses. According to him, the State Apparatus is far more subtle, complicated and consists of unique yet overlapping institutions.
- State Apparatus is of two types as follows: Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) refers to all those institutions which Marxism has already identified. The deliberate use of the ‘repressive’ indicates the characteristic of violent repression inherent in its very nature and functions and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) refers to family, political, communicative Ideological State Apparatuses etc.
- The two state apparatuses are fundamentally different from each-other on the basis of their nature and functions. While Repressive State Apparatus is violent in nature, Ideological State Apparatuses is ideological and non-repressive in nature. It is in this context that Althusser proposed his revolutionary idea where he envisioned such an ideological state apparatus

which not only communicates the ruling ideology, but also structures and defends ideology of the exploited class.

- Althusser attempts to establish again and again that every ideology is not simply a phenomena existing and operating within the boundaries of human mind. Instead, every ideology possesses material existence in the sense that though ideas precede actions; its ideology is prevalent in the practices of the institution (in a subtle form).
- Interpellation is a French term which means ‘to interrogate’ or ‘to call out’. It is believed that human-beings are autonomous individuals with their own specific set of beliefs, thoughts and actions. However, Althusser believes that it is not the individual, who decides his actions, but quite contrarily, it is practice and actions that constitute individuals, In this way, humans are ‘called into’ being as the subjects of ideology. This politics of interpellation is prevalent in the whole system and thereby, manipulates the people to function as subjects ‘all by themselves’.

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10.6 KEY WORDS

- **Public Sphere:** The public sphere is an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action.
- **Feudalism:** Feudalism is the dominant social system in medieval Europe, in which the nobility held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service, and vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants (villeins or serfs) were obliged to live on their lord’s land and give him homage, labour, and a share of the produce, notionally in exchange for military protection.
- **Dramaturgical Action:** Dramaturgical action is action that involves conscious manipulation of oneself before an audience or public. It is ego-centered in that it involves actors mutually manipulating their behaviour to present their own intentions, but it is also social in that such manipulation is done in the context of organized activity.
- **Epistemological:** Relating to the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion.
- **Structuralism:** A method of interpretation and analysis of aspects of human cognition, behaviour, culture, and experience, which focuses on relationships of contrast between elements in a conceptual system.
- **Ideological State Apparatuses:** It is an essay by the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. First published in 1970, it advances Althusser’s theory of ideology.

- **Interpellation:** A term coined by Althusser, describes the process by which ideology addresses the individual.

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10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short biographical note on Jurgen Habermas.
2. Discuss the concept of public sphere as interpreted by Habermas.
3. Explain Habermas's concept of social evolution.
4. Jurgen Habermas is considered as the most influential thinker in Germany. Give reasons for your answers.

Long Answer Questions

1. What do you understand by 'the epistemological break' in Althusser's theory?
2. What do you mean by state apparatuses? What are its different types? Explain with suitable examples.
3. What do you mean by interpellation? What are the possible solutions suggested by Althusser?
4. Discuss material existence in detail.

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - IV
SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, PHENOMENOLOGY
AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

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UNIT 11 SYMBOLIC
INTERACTIONISM

Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Historical Background and C.H. Cooley
- 11.3 George H. Mead's Approach to Symbolic Interactionism
- 11.4 Herbert Blumer's Approach to Symbolic Interactionism
- 11.5 Criticism of Symbolic Interactionism
- 11.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.7 Summary
- 11.8 Key Words
- 11.9 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.10 Further Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

Symbolic interactionism as a theory focusses on patterns of communication, interpretation and interaction through meanings and symbols. To quote a famous anecdote, in the contest of gestures between the learned sages and the ignorant Kalidasa, he responded with a 'fist' to the 'open hand' shown by the former. The hand for the learned symbolized the five elements that constituted the universe, but were interpreted by Kalidasa as a mere threatening slap! The fist for Kalidasa was an angry response to their 'slap' but the learned sages with their tools of knowledge and experience interpreted it to be the 'unity of the five elements'. This illustrates that individuals do not react to reality but to their social interpretation and understanding of reality. Similarly, Liza, the heroine in Shaw's play Pygmalion behaves like a 'lady' with Col. Pickering because she feels he treats her like a gentle lady. On the other hand she behaves like a rebellious brat with Professor Higgins as she feels he treats her with disdain and contempt. Her behaviour in both instances is a response to the meaning she attaches to their behaviour. In fact her perception of herself is affected by how she interprets their respective attitudes towards her. Thus, people do not respond mechanically to the reality around them but respond to their meaning and interpretation of gestures and words and reality.

Like other major sociological theories, symbolic interactionism explains how individuals in society interact through meanings of symbols. Verbal and non-verbal responses are constructed in expectation of how the other would react. George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley and William Isaac Thomas provided the initial core of the theory of social interactionism; but a variety of different perspectives developed in the ensuing years. Traditional symbolic interactionism is represented in the ideas of Herbert Blumer; other varieties include Manford Kuhn's scientific approach, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach and perhaps even ethnomethodology and phenomenology.

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11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the historical development of symbolic interactionism
- Examine Mead's and Blumer's approach to symbolic interactionism
- Evaluate significance of symbolic interactionism

11.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND C.H. COOLEY

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective on self and society based on the ideas of George H. Mead (1934), Charles H. Cooley (1902), W. I. Thomas (1931), and other pragmatists associated, primarily, with the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century. The central theme of symbolic interactionism is that human life is lived in the symbolic domain. Symbols are culturally derived social objects having shared meanings that are created and maintained in social interaction. Through language and communication, symbols provide the means by which reality is constructed. Reality is primarily a social product, and all that is humanly consequential—self, mind, society, culture—emerges from and is dependent on symbolic interactions for its existence. Even the physical environment is relevant to human conduct mainly as it is interpreted through symbolic systems.

Blumer coined the term 'symbolic interactionism' in 1937 and wrote several essays that were instrumental in its development. Mead sought to differentiate the nascent symbolic interactionism from behaviourism, whereas Blumer saw symbolic interactionism as embattled on two fronts. To Blumer, both behaviourism and structural functionalism tended to focus on factors (for example, external stimuli and norms) that compose human behaviour. As far as Blumer was concerned, both ignored the crucial process by which actors endow the forces acting up on them and their own behaviours with meaning (Morrione, 1988).

Cooley's concept of 'The Self'

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The self is a concept of enormous importance to symbolic interactionists. In fact, Rock argues that the self 'constitutes the very hub of the interactionists' intellectual scheme. All other sociological processes and events revolve around that hub, taking from it their analytic meaning and organization'.

Charles Horton Cooley gave the concept of 'looking-glass self' which points out that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others. The idea of a 'looking-glass self' can be broken down into three components. First, we imagine how we appear to others. Second, we imagine what their judgment of what appearance must be. Third, we develop some self-feeling, such as pride or mortification, as a result of our imagining others' judgments.

Cooley's concept of the 'looking-glass self' and Mead's concept of the 'self' were important in the development of the modern symbolic interactionists' conception of the self. Blumer defined the self in extremely simple terms: 'nothing esoteric is meant by this expression (self); it simply means that a human being can be an object of his own action...he acts toward himself and guides himself in his actions toward others on the basis of the kind of object he is to himself.' The 'self' is a process not a thing (Perinbanayagam, 1985). As Blumer stated, the 'self' helps human beings to act rather than simply respond to external stimuli. Although this underscores the part played by the 'self' in the process of choosing how to act, Blumer has really not gone much beyond the early formulations of Cooley and Mead. However, other modern thinkers and researchers have refined the concept of the 'self'.

Although symbolic interactionists have made important contributions to our understanding of the self, the best known recent work on this topic has been done by a sociologist not usually associated with this theory, Morris Rosenberg (1979). Although not a symbolic interactionist, Rosenberg has been heavily influenced by people like Mead and Cooley. His thoughts on the self are generally compatible with and extend the symbolic-interactionists' orientation to this concept.

Rosenberg began by making it clear that his main interest was in self-concept and not the self itself. The self is a more general concept, being both a subject and an object. The self-concept is the self as an object. Rosenberg defines self-concept as 'the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object'. Thus, the self-concept is only a part of the self and even smaller part of the total personality. But it is endowed with unusual significance, because it is an important object to everyone, usually the most important object in the world. In addition to their importance, beliefs about the self are distinctive in a number of ways. For example, they are the only attitudes that are reflexive—that is, the individual is both subject and object. The self-concept is the result of certain incommunicable information; it reflects the individual's unique body of information and point of view about himself. Although attitudes towards the self has much in common with other attitudes, there are unique attitudes toward the self, especially,

pride and shame. Accuracy and verifiability are much more important in attitudes toward the self than in attitudes toward bowling or tuna fish. In spite of its importance, the accuracy of self-attitudes 'is difficult to ascertain because of low verifiability'.

Rosenberg also distinguished among the extant self, the desired self and presenting self. The extant self is our picture of what we are like; the desired self is a picture of what we would like to be like, and the presenting self is the way we present ourselves in a given situation.

Rosenberg underscored the point that self-concept involves a set of motivations, a set of desired goals for the actors. Two motives stand out above all others: (i) self-esteem, or 'the wish to think well of one's self; (ii) self-consistency.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the central theme of symbolic interactionism?
2. Who gave the concept of looking-glass self?

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11.3 GEORGE H. MEAD'S APPROACH TO SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

George Mead was heavily influenced by pragmatism and behaviourism. In Mead's view, traditional social psychology began with the psychology of the individual in an effort to explain social experience. To Mead, the social whole precedes the individual mind, a social group comes first and then it leads to the development of self-conscious mental states.

The Act

Mead considers the act to be the most 'primitive unit' in his theory. It is not in itself an emergent phenomenon, but is rather the reason behind the creation. In other words, the act is the base from which all other aspects of Mead's analysis emerge. In analysing the act, Mead comes closest to the behaviourists' approach and focuses on stimulus and responses. However, even here, the stimulus does not elicit an automatic, unthinking response from the human actor. As Mead says, 'we conceive of the stimulus as an occasion or opportunity for the act, not as a compulsion or mandate'.

Mead, identified four basic and interrelated stages in an act; and these four stages represent an organic whole (in other words, they are dialectically interrelated) of both lower animals' and humans' act. Mead was interested in the similarities, especially the differences between the two.

The *first stage* is that of the 'impulse', which involves an 'immediate sensuous stimulation' and the actor's reaction to the stimulation, the need to do something about it. Hunger is a good example of an impulse. The actor (both non-human and human) may respond immediately and unthinkably to the impulse, but more likely

the human actor will think of an appropriate response (for example, eat now or later). In thinking about a response, the person will consider not only the immediate situation, but also past experiences and anticipated future results of the act.

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We have focused above on an impulse, hunger, which can be traced to the individual. However, such impulses also involve the environment. Hunger may come from an inner state of the actor or may be elicited by the presence of food in the environment, or most likely it may arise from some combination of the two. Furthermore, the hungry person finds a way of satisfying the impulse in an environment in which food may not be immediately available or may be plentiful. This impulse, like all others, may be related to a problem that must be overcome by the actor's deed. While an impulse like hunger may come largely from the individual (although even here hunger can be induced by an external stimuli and there is also social definitions of when it is appropriate to be hungry), it is usually related to the existence of a problem in the environment (for example, the lack of food). To take another example, the approach of a dangerous wild animal may lead to an impulse to a person to act. Overall, the impulse like all other elements of Mead's theory, involves both the actor and the environment.

The *second stage* of the act is 'perception', in which the actor searches for and reacts to stimuli that relate to the impulse, in this case, hunger as well as the various means available to satisfy it. People have the capacity to sense or perceive stimuli through hearing, smell, taste, and so on. Perception involves both incoming stimuli and mental images they create. People do not simply respond immediately to external stimuli, but rather think about and assess them through mental imagery. People are not simply subject to external stimulation; they also actively select characteristics of stimuli, and choose among sets of stimuli i.e., if a stimulus has several dimensions and the actor is able to select among them. Furthermore, people are usually confronted with many different stimuli, and they have the capacity to choose which to attend to and which to ignore. Mead refuses to separate people from the objects that they perceive. In the act of perceiving what differentiates an object from a person, perception and object cannot be separated from (being dialectally related) to one another.

The *third stage* is of 'manipulation'. Once the impulse has manifested and the object has been perceived, the next step is the manipulation of the object, or more generally, taking action with regard to it. In addition to their mental advantages, people have another advantage over lower animals. People have hands (with opposable thumbs) that allow them to manipulate objects far more subtly than animals. For Mead, the manipulation phase constitutes an important temporary pause in the process, so that a response is not manifest immediately. Hungry human beings see a mushroom, but before eating it, he is likely to pick it up, examine it, and perhaps check in a guidebook to see whether that particular variety is edible. The lower animal, on the other hand, is likely to eat the mushroom without handling and examining it (and certainly without reading about it). The pause afforded by

handling the object allows humans to contemplate various responses. In thinking about whether to eat the mushroom, both the past and the future are involved. People may think about past experiences in which they ate certain mushrooms that made them ill, and they may think about the future sickness, or even death, that might accompany eating a poisonous mushroom. The manipulation of the mushrooms becomes a kind of experimental method in which the actor mentally tries out various hypotheses about what would happen if the mushroom is consumed.

On the basis of these deliberations, the actor may decide to eat the mushroom (or not) and this constitutes the last phase, or the *fourth stage*, of the act, 'consummation'. Consummation is basically taking an action which satisfies the original impulse. Both humans and lower animals may consume the mushroom, but the human is less likely to eat a bad mushroom, because of his ability to manipulate the mushroom and to think (and read) about the implications of eating it. The lower animal must rely on a trial and error method, which in this situation is quite dangerous.

While for ease of discussion, the four stages of the act have been separated from one another in sequential order, the fact remains that Mead sees a dialectical relationship among the four stages. John Baldwin expresses this idea in the following way: 'although the four parts of the act sometimes appear to be linked in linear order, they actually interpenetrate to form one organic process—facets of each part are present at all times from the beginning of the act to the end, such that each part affects the other'. Thus, the later stages of the act may lead to the emergence of earlier stages. For example, the manipulation of food may lead the individual to the impulse of hunger and the perception that one is hungry and that something is available to satisfy the need.

Gestures

While the act involves only one person, the social act involves two or more persons. The 'gesture', in Mead's view, is the basic mechanism in the social act and in the social process. Mead defines 'gestures' as, 'movements of the first organism which act as specific stimuli calling forth the (socially) appropriate responses of the second organism'. Both lower animals and humans are capable of gestures in the sense that the action of one individual mindlessly and automatically elicits a reaction by another individual. The following is Mead's (1934) famous example of a dog fight in terms of gestures:

The act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response.... The very fact that the dog is ready to attack another becomes a stimulus to the other dog to change his own position of his own attitude. He has no sooner done this than the change of attitude in the second dog in turn causes the first dog to change his attitude.

Mead labels what is taking place in this situation a conversation of gestures. One dog's gesture automatically elicits a gesture from the second, there are no thought processes taking place on the part of the dogs.

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Humans sometimes engage in mindless conversations of gestures. Mead gives the example of the actions and reactions that take place in boxing and fencing matches, where one combatant adjusts 'instinctively' to the actions of the second. Mead labels such unconscious actions as 'non-significant gestures'. What distinguishes humans is their ability to employ significant gestures or those that require thought on the part of the actor before a reaction takes place. The vocal gesture is particularly important in the development of significant gestures. However, not all vocal gestures are significant. The bark of one dog to another is not significant. However, it is the development of vocal gestures especially in the form of language which is the most important factor in making possible the distinctive development of human life. According to Mead, the specialization of the human animal within this field of gestures has been responsible, ultimately, for the origin and growth of present human society and knowledge with control over nature and human environment.

The above development is related to distinctive characteristics of the vocal gesture. When we make a physical gesture such as facial grimaces, we cannot not see what we ourselves are doing (unless we happen to be looking in the mirror); on the other hand, when we utter a vocal gesture, it can affect the speaker in much the same way that it affects the listeners. Another distinction is that we are far better able to stop ourselves in vocal gestures than we are able to do in physical gestures. In other words, we have far better control over vocal gestures than physical ones. The ability to control oneself and one's reactions is crucial, as we see the other distinctive capabilities of humans. More often, 'it has been the vocal gesture that has pre-eminently provided the medium of social organization in human society' (Mead, 1959).

Significant Symbols

A significant symbol is a kind of gesture, one which only humans are capable of making. Gestures are considered noteworthy only when they elicit the same kind of response (if need not identical) in the individual making them and to whom the gesture is being addressed. Only when we have significant symbols, can we truly have communication. Communication in the full sense of the term is not possible among ants, bees and so on. Physical gestures can be significant symbols, but as we have seen, they are not ideally suited to this, because people cannot easily see or hear their own physical gesture. Thus, it is vocal utterances that are most likely to become significant symbols, although not all vocalizations are such symbols. The set of vocal gestures that is most likely to become significant symbols is a language—'a system which answers to a meaning in the experience of the first individual and which also calls out the meaning in the second individual'. In a conversation of gestures, only the gestures themselves are communicated. However, with language, the gestures as well as their meanings are communicated.

One of the things that language or significant symbols more generally does is call out the same response in the individual as it does in others. The word 'dog'

or 'cat' elicits the same mental image in the person uttering the word as it does in those to whom it is addressed. Another effect of language is that it stimulates the person speaking as it does the others who are listening. The person yelling 'fire' in a crowded theatre is as motivated to leave the theatre as are those who hear the shout. Thus, significant symbols allow people to be the stimulators of their own actions.

Adopting his pragmatist orientation, Mead also looks at the 'functions' of gestures, in general, and significant symbols, in particular. The function of the gesture, 'is to make adjustment possible among the individuals implicated in any given social act with reference to the object with which that act is concerned'. Thus, involuntary facial grimaces may be made in order to prevent a child from going too close to the edge of a precipice, and thereby prevent him from being in a potentially dangerous situation. While no significant gesture works from a pragmatic viewpoint, a significant symbol works better in the social world than a non-significant gesture. In other words, in communicating our displeasure to others, an angry verbal rebuke works far better than contorted body language. Thus, the speaker can think about how the other person might react and can prepare his reaction to that action.

Of crucial importance, in Mead's theory is another function of significant symbols—they impact the mind and mental processes. It is only through significant symbols, especially language, that human thinking is possible. Mead defines thinking as 'simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures'. Even more strongly, Mead argues: 'thinking is the same as talking to other people'. In other words, thinking involves talking to oneself. Thus, we can see clearly how Mead defines thinking in behaviourist terms. Conversations involve behaviour (talking) and that behaviour also occurs within the individual; when it does, thinking is taking place. This is not a mentalistic definition of thinking; it is decidedly behaviouristic.

Significant symbols also make symbolic interaction possible. That is, people can interact with one another not just through gestures but also through significant symbols. This, of course, makes possible more complex interaction patterns and forms of social organization than would be possible through gestures alone. According to Miller: 'Mead's most profound insight consists in understanding that the significant symbol, the language symbol, consists of a gesture whose meaning is had by both the one who makes the gesture and the other to whom it is addressed. He spent most of his intellectual life unravelling the implications of this insight.'

Mental Processes and the Mind

One term that sounds like it belongs under the heading of mental processes but actually does not in Mead's thinking, is 'intelligence'. Mead defines 'intelligence' most broadly as the mutual adjustment of the acts of organism. By this definition, lower animals clearly have intelligence because in a conversation of gestures they adapt to one another. Similarly humans can adapt to one another through the use of non-significant symbols (for example, involuntary grimaces). However, what

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distinguishes humans is that they can also exhibit intelligence, or mutual adaptation through the use of significant symbols. Thus, a bloodhound has intelligence, but the intelligence of the detective is distinguished from that of the bloodhound by the capacity to use significant symbols.

Mead argues that animals have ‘unreasoning intelligence’. In contrast, humans have reason which Mead defines in a characteristically behaviouristic manner: ‘when you are reasoning, you are indicating to yourself the characters that call out certain responses—and that is all you are doing’. In other words, individuals are carrying on conversations with themselves.

What is crucial to the reflective intelligence of humans is their ability to temporarily inhibit action, to delay their reactions to a stimulus. In the case of lower animals, a stimulus leads immediately and inevitably to a reaction, lower animals lack the capacity to temporarily inhibit their reactions. Humans, because of their ability to delay reactions are able to organize in their own minds the array of possible responses to a situation. Humans possess in their minds the alternative ways of completing a social act in which they are involved. People are able to test out mentally, through an internal conversation with themselves, the various course of action. In contrast, lower animals lack this capacity and, therefore, must try out reactions in the real-world in trial-and-error fashion. The ability to try out responses mentally (as we saw in the case of the poison mushroom earlier) is much more effective than the trial-and-error method.

There is no social cost involved in mentally trying out a poorly adapted response. However, when a lower animal actually uses such a response in the real world, the results can be costly, even disastrous. Besides this, humans are able to pick out one stimulus among a set of stimuli rather than simply reacting to the first or strongest stimulus. In addition, humans can select among a range of alternative actions, whereas lower animals simply act. The ability to choose among a range of actions makes it probable that the choices of humans are likely to be better adapted to the situation than the immediate and mindless reactions of lower animals. As Mead contends, ‘intelligence is largely a matter of selectivity’.

Mead also discusses consciousness, which he sees as having two distinguishable meanings. The first is that to which the actor alone has access, and is entirely subjective. Mead is less interested in this sense of consciousness than the second, which basically involves ‘reflective intelligence’. Consciousness is to be explained within the social process. That is in contrast to most analysts, Mead believes that consciousness is not lodged in the brain, ‘consciousness is functional not substantive, and in either of the main senses of the term it must be located in the subjective world rather than in the brain—it belongs to, or is a characteristic of the environment in which we find ourselves. What is located, what does take place, in the brain, however, is the physiological process whereby we lose and regain consciousness’. In a similar manner, Mead refuses to position mental images in the brain but sees them as a social phenomenon.

‘Meaning’ is yet another related concept that Mead addresses behaviouristically. Characteristically, Mead rejects the idea that the ‘meaning’ lies in consciousness. Similarly, Mead rejects the idea that ‘meaning’ is a psychological phenomenon or an idea. Rather, ‘meaning’ lies squarely within the social act. ‘Meaning’ arises and lies within the field of the relation between the gesture of a given human organism and the subsequent behaviour of this organism as indicated to another human organism by that gesture. If that gesture brings about the desired reaction from the subsequent organism, then it has meaning. It is the adjustive response of the second organism that gives meaning to the gesture of the first organism. The meaning of a gesture can be seen as the ‘ability to predict the behaviour that is likely to occur next’ (Baldwin, 1986).

While meaning is to be found, in behaviour, it becomes conscious when meaning is associated with symbols. However, while meaning can become conscious among humans, it is present in the social act prior to the emergence of consciousness and the awareness of the meanings. Thus, in these terms, lower animals (and humans) can engage in meaningful behaviour even though they are not aware of meanings.

Like consciousness, the mind, is defined by Mead as a process and not a thing, as an inner conversation with one’s self. It is not intracranial but is a social phenomenon. It arises and develops within the social process and is an integral part of that process. Thus, the social process precedes the mind. It is not as many believe a product of the mind. Thus, the mind, too, is defined functionally rather than substantively. A distinctive characteristic of the mind is the ability of the individual ‘to call out in him not simply a single response of the other but the response so, to speak, of the community as a whole’ (Mead, 1934/1962). Thus, the mind can be distinguished from other like-sounding concepts in Mead’s work by its ability to respond to the overall community and put forth an organized response.

Mead also looks at the mind in another, pragmatic way. That is, the mind involves thought processes oriented toward problem-solving. The real world is full of problems, and it is the function of the mind to try to solve those problems and permit people to operate more effectively in the world.

The Self

Much of Mead’s thinking in general and especially on the mind, involves his ideas on the critically important concept of the ‘self’. The ‘self’ is basically the ability to take oneself as an object: the self has the peculiar ability to be both subject and object. As is true of all Mead’s major concepts, the self presupposes a social process: communication among humans. Lower animals do not have selves, nor do human infants at birth. The ‘self’ arises with development and through social activity and social relationships. To Mead, it is impossible to imagine a self arising in the absence of social experiences. It is possible for it to continue to exist without social contact. Thus, Robinson Crusoe developed a self while he was in civilization,

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and he continued to have the ability to take himself as an object. Once it is developed, people usually but not always manifest a self. For example, the self is not involved in habitual actions or in immediate physiological experiences of pleasure and pain.

The self is dialectally related to the mind, that is, on the one hand, Mead argues that the body is both a self and becomes a self only when a mind has developed. Of course, it is impossible to separate mind and self, because the self is a mental process. However, even though we may think of it as a mental process—like all other mental processes in Mead’s theoretical system—it is a social process.

In his discussion of the self, as we saw above in regard to all other mental phenomena, Mead resists the idea of lodging it in consciousness and instead embeds it in social experience and social processes. In this way, Mead seeks to give a behaviourists’ sense of the self. The self, then is simply another aspect of the overall social process of which the individual is a part.

The general mechanism for the development of the self is reflexivity, or the ability to put ourselves unconsciously into others’ places and to act as they act. As a result of this, people are able to examine themselves as others would examine themselves. The ‘self’ also allows people to take part in their conversations with others. That is, one is aware of what one is saying and as a result is able to monitor what is being said and to determine what is going to be said next.

In order to have selves, individuals must be able to get ‘outside themselves’ so that they can evaluate themselves, so that they can become objects to themselves. To do this, people basically put themselves in the same experiential field as they put everyone else. The fact is that everyone is an important part of that experiential situation, and people must take themselves into account if they are able to act rationally in a given situation. Having done this, they seek to examine themselves impersonally, objectively and without emotion. However, people cannot experience themselves directly. They can do so only indirectly by putting themselves in the position of others and viewing them from that point.

Mead is very interested in the genesis of the self. He sees the conversation of gestures as the background for the self, but it does not involve a self, since in such a conversation the people are not taking themselves as objects. Mead traces the genesis of the self through two stages in childhood development. The first is the *play stage*, and it is during this stage that children learn to take the attitude of particular others to themselves. ‘While lower animals also play, only human beings play at being someone else’ (Aboulafia, 1986). Mead gives the example of child playing (American) ‘Indian’. This means that the child has a certain set of stimuli which call out in itself the response they would call out in others, and which answer to an Indian. As a result of such play the child learns to become both subject and object and begins to become able to build a self. However, it is a limited self because the child is only capable of taking the role of distinct and separates others. Children may play at being ‘mommy’ and ‘daddy’ and in the process develop the

ability to evaluate themselves as their parents, and other specific individuals. However, they lack a more general and organized sense of themselves.

It is the next stage, the *game stage*, that it is required that the person develops a 'self' in the full sense of the term. While in the play stage, the child takes the role of discrete others, in the game stage the child must take on the role of everyone else involved in the game. Furthermore, these different roles must have a definite relationship to one another. In illustrating the game stage, Mead gives his famous example of a baseball (or, as he calls it, 'Ball Nine') game:

But in game where a number of individuals are involved, then the child taking one role must be ready to take the role of everyone else. If he gets in a 'ball nine', he must have the responses of each position involved in his own position. He must know what everyone else is going to do in order to carry out own play. He has to take all of these roles. They do not all have to be present in consciousness. At the same time, he has to have three or four individuals present in his own attitude, such as the one who is going to throw the ball, the one who is going to catch it, and so on. These responses must be in some degree present in his own make-up. In the game, then, there is a set of responses of such others so organized that the attitudes of one call out the appropriate attitudes of the other.

In the play stage, children are not organized wholes, because they play at a series of discrete roles; and as a result, in Mead's view, children lack definite personalities. However, in the game stage, such organization begins and a definite personality starts to emerge. Children are able to function in organized groups, and significantly able to determine what they will do within specific groups.

The game stage yields one of Mead's best-known concepts, the 'generalized other'. The **generalized other** is the attitude of the entire community, or in the example of the baseball game, the attitude of the entire team. The ability to take the role of the generalized other is essential to the self: 'only in so far as he takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he belongs towards the organized, cooperative social activity or set of such activities in which that group is engaged, does he develop a complete self'. It is also crucial that people be able to evaluate themselves from the viewpoint of the generalized other, and not merely from the viewpoint of discrete others. Taking the role of the generalized other, rather than of discrete other, allows for the possibility of abstract thinking and objectivity.

In other words, if we are to have a 'self'; one must be a member of a community and be directed by the attitudes to the community. While play requires only pieces of selves, the game requires a 'coherent self'.

Not only is taking the role of the generalized other essential to the self, but it is also crucial for the development of organized group activities. A group requires that individuals direct their activities in accord with the attitudes of the generalized other. The 'generalized other' also represents Mead's familiar propensity to give

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priority to the social, since it is through the generalized other that the group influences the behaviour of individuals.

Mead also looks at the self from a pragmatic viewpoint. At the individual level, the self allows the individual to be a more efficient member of the larger society. Since people often try to live up to group expectations, they are more likely to avoid the inefficiencies that come from failing to do what the group expects. Furthermore, the self allows for greater coordination in society as a whole. As individuals can be counted on to do what is expected of them, the group can operate more effectively.

The discussion of the 'self' might lead us to believe that Mead's actors are little more than conformists and that there is little individuality, since everyone is busy conforming to the expectations of the generalized other. But Mead is clear that each self is different from all others. Selves share a common structure, but each self receives unique biographical articulation. In addition, it is clear that there is not simply one grand generalized other, but that there are many generalized others in society, because there are many groups in society. People, therefore, have multiple generalized others and as a result multiple selves. Each person's unique set of selves makes him different from everyone else. Furthermore, people need not accept the community as it is; they can seek to make it better via their capacity to think. In other words, to stand up to the generalized other, the individual must construct a still larger generalized other, composed not only from the present but also from the past and the future, and then respond to it.

Mead identifies two aspects, or phrases of the 'self' which he labels the 'I' and the 'Me'. It is important to bear in mind that the 'I' and 'Me' are processes within the larger process of the self. They are not tangible things. The 'I' is the immediate response of an individual to others. It is the incalculable, unpredictable, and creative aspect of the self. People do not know in advance what the action of the 'I' will be. We are never totally aware of the 'I' and through it we surprise ourselves with our actions. We know the 'I' only after the act has been carried out. Thus, we know the 'I' only in our memories. Mead lays great stress on the 'I' for four reasons:

- (i) It is a key source of novelty in the social process.
- (ii) It is in the 'I' that our most important values are located.
- (iii) It is the 'I' that permits us to develop a 'definite Personality'. Finally, Mead sees
- (iv) Primitive societies are dominated more by 'Me', while modern societies have a greater component of 'I', leading to evolutionary process.

On the other hand 'Me' is the organized set of attitudes of others. In other words, the 'Me' is the adoption of the generalized other. The 'Me' involves conscious responsibility. Conformists are dominated by 'Me', although everyone—whatever, his degree of conformity—has and must have substantial 'Me'. It is

through the 'Me' that society dominates the individual. Indeed, Mead defines the idea of social control as the dominance of the expression of the 'Me' over the expression of the 'I'.

The 'I' gives Mead's theoretical system some much-needed dynamism and creativity. Without it, Mead's actors would be totally dominated by external and internal controls. With it, Mead is able to deal with the changes brought about not only by the great figures in history (for example, Einstein) but also by individuals on a day-to-day basis. It is the 'I' that makes these changes possible. Since every personality is a mix of 'I' and 'Me', the great historical figures are seen as having a larger proportion of 'I' than most others. But in day-to-day situations, anyone's 'I' may assert itself and lead to change in the social situation. Uniqueness is also brought into Mead's system through the biographical articulation of each individual's 'I' and 'Me'. That is, the specific exigencies of each person's life give him a unique mix of 'I' and 'Me'.

Mead also looks at the 'I' and 'Me' in pragmatic terms. The 'Me' allows the individual to live comfortably in the social world, while the 'I' makes the change of society possible. Society gets enough conformity to allow it to function, and it gets a steady infusion of new developments to prevent it from stagnating. The 'I' and the 'Me' are thus part of the whole social process and allow both individuals and society to function more effectively.

Society

At the most general level, Mead uses the term 'society' to mean the ongoing social process that precedes both the mind and the self. Given its importance in shaping the mind and self, society to Mead represents the organized set of responses that are taken over by the individual in the form of the 'Me'. Thus, in this sense, individuals carry society around with them. And it is this that allows them, through self-criticism, to control themselves. Though Mead deals with the evolution of society, he has relatively little to say about society explicitly, in spite of its centrality in his theoretical system. His most important contributions are his thoughts on mind and self. Even John Baldwin, who sees a much more societal (macro) component in Mead's thinking, is forced to admit: 'the macro-components of Mead's theoretical system are not as well developed as the micro-component'

Education

Education is the process by which the common habits of the community (the institution) are internalized in the actor. This is an essential process, since in Mead's view, people neither have selves nor are genuine members of the community until they can respond to themselves as the larger community does. To do so, people must have internalized the common attitudes of the community.

But again, Mead is careful to point out that institutions need not destroy individuality or stifle creativity. Mead recognizes that there are 'oppressive,

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stereotyped and ultra-conservative social institutions, like the church, which by their more or less rigid and inflexible unprogressiveness crush or blot out individuality. According to Mead, institutions should define what people ought to do only in a very broad and general sense and should allow plenty of room for individuality and creativity.

What Mead lacks in his analysis of society in general and institutions in particular, is a true macro sense of them in the way that theorists like Marx, Weber and Durkheim dealt with this level of analysis.

Check Your Progress

3. What does Mead consider the most primitive unit in this theory to be?
4. What is Mead's concept of the self?
5. What does Mead mean when he uses the term society?

11.4 HERBERT BLUMER'S APPROACH TO SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Blumer, a student of George Herbert Mead, has systematically developed the ideas of his mentor. In Blumer's view, symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises. Firstly, human beings act on the basis of meanings which they give to objects and events rather than simply reacting either to external stimuli such as social forces or internal stimuli such as organic drives. Symbolic interactionism therefore rejects both societal and biological determinism. Secondly, meanings arise from the process of interaction rather than simply being present at the outset and shaping future action. To some degree meanings are created, modified, developed and changed within interaction situations rather than being fixed and preformed. In the process of interaction actors do not slavishly follow preset norms or mechanically act out established roles. Thirdly, meanings are the result of interpretive procedures employed by actors within interaction contexts. By taking the role of the other, actors interpret the meanings and intentions of others. By means of 'the mechanism of self-interaction', individuals modify or change their definition of the situation, rehearse alternative courses of action and consider their possible consequences. Thus the meanings that guide action arise in the context of interaction via a series of complex interpretive procedures.

Blumer argues that the interactionist perspective contrasts sharply with the view of social action presented by mainstream sociology. He maintains that society must be seen as an ongoing process of interaction involving actors who are constantly adjusting to one another and continuously interpreting the situation. By contrast, mainstream sociology and functionalism in particular have tended to portray action as a mechanical response to the constraints of social systems.

Although he is critical of those who see action as a predictable and standardized response to external constraints, Blumer accepts that action is to some degree structured and routinized. He states that, 'in most situations in which people act towards one another they have in advance a firm understanding of how to act and how other people will act'. However, such knowledge offers only general guidelines for conduct. It does not provide a precise and detailed recipe for action which is mechanically followed in every situation. Within these guidelines there is considerable room for manoeuvre, negotiation, mutual adjustment and interpretation. Similarly, Blumer recognizes the existence of social institutions and admits that they place limits on human conduct, but even in situations where strict rules prevail, there is still considerable room for human initiative and creativity.

Herbert Blumer claimed that people interact with each other by interpreting or defining each other's actions rather than merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'responses' are not made directly to the actions of one another, but rather are based on the 'meaning' they attach to such actions. Thus, for Blumer, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols and signification, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions (Blumer, 1962). Blumer believed that the term 'symbolic interactionism' has come into use as a label for a relatively distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct.

Groups and Societies

Symbolic interactionism was concerned with the interrelationships of individual thought and action, and this gave it a distinctive perspective on society's large-scale structures. Symbolic interactionists are generally highly critical of the tendency of other sociologists to focus on macrostructures. Blumer is in the forefront of those who are critical of this 'sociological determinism (in which), the social action of people is treated as an outward flow or expression of forces playing on them rather as acts which are built up by people through their interpretation of the situations in which they are placed..

Instead of seeing actors as those who actively define their situations, traditional sociologists tend to reduce actors to 'mindless robots on the societal or aggregate level'. In an effort to stay away from determinism and robot-like view of actors, symbolic interactionists take a very different view of large-scale social structures, a view that is ably presented by Herbert Blumer.

To Blumer, society is not made up of macro structures. The essence of society is to be found in actors and action: 'human society is to be seen as consisting of acting people, and the life of the society is to be seen as consisting of their actions'. For him, human society is action; group life is a complex of ongoing activity. However, society is not made up of an array of isolated acts. There is collective action as well, which involves 'individuals fitting their lines of action to one another... participants making indications to one another, not merely each to himself'. That gives rise to what Mead called 'social act' and 'joint action'.

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A 'joint action' is not simply the sum total of individual acts—it comes to have a character of its own. A joint action, thus, is not external to or corrosive of actors and their actions, rather it is created by actors and their actions. The study of joint action, in Blumer's view, is the domain of the sociologists.

From this discussion one gets the sense that the joint act is almost totally flexible, i.e., society can become almost anything that the actors want it to be. However, Blumer was not prepared to go as far as that. He argued that each instance of joint action must be formed anew; but he did recognize that joint action is likely to have a 'well-established and repetitive form'. Not only does most joint action recur in patterns, but Blumer was also willing to admit that such action is guided by systems of pre-established meanings, such as culture and social order.

Blumer admitted that there are large-scale structures and that they are important. Here Blumer followed Mead, who admitted that such structures are very important. Despite this, such structures have an extremely limited role in symbolic interactionism. For one thing, Blumer most often argued that large-scale structures are little more than 'frameworks' within which the really important aspects of social life, action and interaction take place. Large-scale structures do set the conditions, and set limitations on human action but they do not determine it. In his view, people do not act within the context of such structures as society; rather they act in situations. Large-scale structures are important in that they shape the situations in which individuals act and supply to actors the fixed set of symbols that enable them to act.

Even when Blumer discussed such pre-established patterns, he hastened to make clear that 'areas of un-prescribed conduct are just as natural, indigenous and recurrent in human group life as those areas covered by pre-established and faithfully followed prescriptions of joint action'. Not only are there many un-prescribed areas, but even in prescribed areas, joint action has to be consistently created and re-created. Actors are guided by generally accepted meanings in this creation and re-creation, but they are not determined by them. They may accept them as is, but they also can make minor and even major alterations in them. In Blumer's word, it is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life.

Clearly, Blumer was not inclined to accord culture independent and coercive status in his theoretical system. Nor was he about to accord this status to the extended connections of group life, or what is generally called, 'social structure', for example, the division of labour. A network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called on to act'.

Methodological Principles

In addition to its theoretical principles, symbolic interactionism also encompasses a set of methodological postulates.

Blumer had great respect for the difficulties involved in studying the action and interaction that take place in the real world. He often spoke of the 'obdurate character' of the real world. Sociologists must engage in constant efforts to develop ways of studying it. Scientific models are to be developed and tested in and against the real world and are useful only if they help us understand that world.

Blumer was a severe critic of what he considered the tendency toward mindless scientism in sociology. He did not reject the use of quantitative methods, though he clearly saw them as far less valuable than most conventional sociologists consider them. Many methods may prove useful in understanding the real world. Similarly, Blumer was critical of the tendency to reduce the complexity of social life to scientific variables. The simplistic correlation of variables tends to ignore the interpretive process that is so central to social life. Blumer criticized abstract theoretical schema for much the same reason.

Blumer was also critical of most sociological concepts that serve as prescriptions for what sociologists should see in the real world. Such concepts do enormous violence to the reality of that world. Instead of advocating traditional concepts, he supported the use of 'sensitizing concepts', which simply suggests what to look for and where to look for and which do less violence to the real world. Finally, Blumer urged the use of sympathetic introspection to study social life. In other words, in their research, symbolic interactionists must put themselves in the places of the actors whom they are studying in order to understand the situation from their viewpoint. This leads to a preference for 'soft' rather than hard methods in symbolic interactionism. However, Blumer did not believe that this preference reflects the scientific immaturity of sociology; rather it indicates the distinctive subject matter of the field.

11.5 CRITICISM OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Having analysed the ideas of symbolic interactionism, we will now enumerate some of the major criticisms of this perspective:

1. The *first* criticism is that the mainstream of symbolic interactionism has too readily given up on conventional scientific techniques. Eugene Weinstein and Judith Tanur expressed this point well: 'Just because the contents of consciousness are qualitative does not mean that their exterior expression cannot be coded, classified, and even counted.' Science and subjectivism are not mutually exclusive.
2. Manford Kuhn (1964), William Kolb (1944) Bernard Meltzer, James Petras, Larry Reynolds (1975) and many others have criticized the vagueness of essential Meadian concepts such as mind, self and me. At the forefront was Kuhn (1964) who spoke of the ambiguities and contradictions in Mead's theory. Beyond Meadian theory, they have criticized many of the basic symbolic-integrationist concepts for being confused and imprecise, and

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therefore incapable of providing a firm basis for theory and research. Because these concepts are imprecise, it is difficult, to operationalize them; the result is that testable propositions cannot be generalized.

3. Another criticism of symbolic interactionism is that larger structures are downplayed or ignored. Weinstein and Tanur argued that symbolic interactionism ignores the connectedness of outcomes to each other. The concept of social structure is necessary to deal with the incredible density and complexity of relations through which episodes of interaction are interconnected'. Sheldon Stryker argued that the micro-focus of symbolic interactionism serves 'to minimize or deny the facts of social structures and the impact of the macro-organizational features of society on behaviour'. Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds also viewed this as a major weakness.
4. Somewhat less predictable is the criticism, that symbolic interactionism is not sufficiently microscopic, that it ignores the importance of such factors as the unconscious and emotions. Similarly, symbolic interactionism has been criticized for ignoring such psychological factors as needs, motives, intentions and aspirations. In their effort to deny that there are immutable forces impelling the actor to act, symbolic interactionists have focused instead on meanings, symbols, action and interaction. They ignore psychological factors that might impel the actor, which parallels their neglect of the larger societal constraints on the actor. In both cases, symbolic interactionists are accused of making a 'fetish' out of everyday life. There is an over emphasis on the immediate situation. The concern is only on the transient, episodic and fleeting'.

Check Your Progress

6. How does symbolic interactionism view societal and biological determinism?
7. How does Blumer view society?
8. List one criticism of symbolic interactionism.

11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The central theme of symbolic interactionism is that human life is lived in the symbolic domain.
2. Charles Horton Cooley gave the concept of 'looking-glass self' which points out that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others.
3. Mead considers the act to be the most 'primitive unit' in his theory. It is not in itself an emergent phenomenon, but is rather the reason behind the creation.

In other words, the act is the base from which all other aspects of Mead's analysis emerge.

4. Mead's concept of the 'self' is basically the ability to take oneself as an object: the self has the peculiar ability to be both subject and object.
5. At the most general level, Mead uses the term 'society' to mean the ongoing social process that precedes both the mind and the self.
6. Symbolic interactionism rejects both societal and biological determinism.
7. Blumer maintains that society must be seen as an ongoing process of interaction involving actors who are constantly adjusting to one another and continuously interpreting the situation.
8. One criticism of symbolic interactionism is that larger structures are downplayed or ignored.

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11.7 SUMMARY

- Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective on self and society based on the ideas of George H. Mead (1934), Charles H. Cooley (1902), W. I. Thomas (1931), and other pragmatists associated, primarily, with the University of Chicago in the early twentieth century.
- Charles Horton Cooley gave the concept of 'looking-glass self' which points out that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others.
- The most important theory in symbolic interactionism is that of George Herbert Mead's, which accorded primacy and priority to the social world i.e., it propagates that consciousness, the mind, the self, and so on, emerge out of the social world.
- Significant symbols lead to the development of language and the distinctive capacity of humans to communicate, in the full sense of the term, with one another. Significant symbols also make possible thinking as well as symbolic interaction.
- Mead also looks at an array of mental processes as part of the larger social process, including reflective intelligence, consciousness, mental images, meanings and the mind. Humans have the distinctive capacity to carry on inner conversations with themselves. All the mental processes are not, according to Mead, lodged in the brain but rather in the social process.
- The 'self' is the ability to take oneself as an object. The 'self' arises with development and through social activity and social relationships.
- The function of the gesture, 'is to make adjustment possible among the individuals implicated in any given social act with reference to the object with which that act is concerned'.

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- While in the play stage, the child takes the role of discrete others, in the game stage the child must on take the role of everyone else involved in the game.
- Taking the role of the generalized other, rather than of discrete other, allows for the possibility of abstract thinking and objectivity.
- If we are to have a 'self'; one must be a member of a community and be directed by the attitudes to the community; while play requires only pieces of selves, the game requires a 'coherent self'.
- The 'generalized other' also represents mead's familiar propensity to give priority to the social, since it is through the generalized other that the group influences the behaviour of individuals.
- It is important to bear in mind that the 'i' and 'me' are processes within the larger process of the self. The 'i' is the immediate response of an individual to others. It is the incalculable, unpredictable, and creative aspect of the self.
- According to Blumer, society is not made up of macro structures and the essence of society is to be found in actors and action.
- Blumer accepted the idea of emergence that large-scale structures emerge from micro-processes; and for him, it is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life.
- Blumer differentiates among three types of objects: (i) *physical* objects such as a chair, or a tree; (ii) *social* objects such as a student or a mother; and (iii) *abstract* objects such as an idea or a moral principle.
- The major criticism of symbolic interactionism has been of its tendency to downplay or ignore large-scale social structures.

11.8 KEY WORDS

- **Pragmatism:** It is a philosophy which believes that reality is actively created as we act in and towards the world.
- **Behaviourism:** It is a school of thought which states that a stimulus elicits an observable response or behaviour.
- **Looking-glass Self:** It refers to a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and perceptions of others.
- **Generalized Other:** It refers to the attitude of the entire community.

11.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on symbolic interactionism.
2. What are the reasons that Mead lays great stress on the 'I'?
3. What is meant by the 'generalized other'?
4. Discuss Cooley's concept of 'looking glass self'.

Long Answer Questions

1. Explain Mead's approach to an 'act'.
2. Which are the different types of gestures as identified by Mead? Give examples.
3. Elaborate on the concept of 'the self' as propagated by Mead.
4. Give a detailed account on the Blumer's approach to symbolic interactionism.
5. What are the general criticisms for symbolic interactionism?

11.10 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 12 PHENOMENOLOGY AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

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Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Overview of Phenomenological Sociology
- 12.3 Alfred H. Schutz
 - 12.3.1 Common-Sense Types and Social Science Types
- 12.4 The Social Construction of Reality: Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann
 - 12.4.1 Habitualization, Institutionalization and the Sociology of Knowledge
- 12.5 Harold Garfinkel's Approach to Ethnomethodology
- 12.6 Ethnomethodologists' Criticisms of Traditional Sociology
- 12.7 Peter Blau: Process of Exchange, Value, Norms and Social Exchange Theory
- 12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.9 Summary
- 12.10 Key Words
- 12.11 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.12 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about symbolic interactionism through the theories of C.H Colley, Georg H Mead and Herbert Blumer. In this unit, we will discuss phenomenology and ethnomethodology.

Phenomenology refers the study of the formal structures of concrete social existence as made available in and through the analytical description of acts of intentional consciousness. The goal of such an analysis is the meaningful lived world of everyday life. On the other hand, Ethnomethodology can be thought to be the study of methods people employ for comprehending and producing the social order in which they live. The theory generally seeks to provide an alternative to mainstream sociological approaches. This unit will the theories of phenomenology and ethnomethodology through the ideas of A. Schutz, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, H Garfinkel and Peter Blau.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the main ideas of habituation, institutionalization and sociology of knowledge
- List the main influences on the concept of social construction of reality

- Analyse Garfinkel’s approach to ethnomethodology
- Identify ethnomethodologists’ criticisms on traditional sociology
- Explain the concept of phenomenology
- Analyse the social theories of Alfred Schutz
- Discuss the ideas of Peter Blau

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12.2 OVERVIEW OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY

Unlike the more traditional approaches in sociological theory and methodology which emphasize the historical and functional character of social behaviour, phenomenological and ethnomethodological sociology are interpretive approaches to social life which emphasize ‘the need to understand social action from the point of view of the social actor.’ In keeping with man’s primordial urge to know and understand himself and his relationship to others, these two approaches attempt to identify (i) the meaning people find in their world—things, persons, events (ii) the perspectives from which people see themselves and others, and (iii) the motives that underlie their behaviour.

Here is a handy distinction justified between the traditional sociology of knowledge and phenomenological sociology as it’s practiced today. The distinction is not so much a kind as it is an emphasis in analytical approaches and perspectives, for whereas ‘phenomenological sociologists are interested in the foundation in inter subjective consciousness (individual’s own personalistic reflections) of everyday life, the traditional sociology of knowledge has dealt with the relationship between socio–historical circumstances and knowledge, particularly intellectual knowledge.

The term ‘phenomenology’ as it is used by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in his most notable philosophical treatise, ‘*Ideas: Introduction to pure phenomenology* (1913)’ designates first of all a principle of philosophical and scientific method. The usual method of natural science proceeds from a body of accepted truth and seeks to extend its conquest of the unknown by putting questions to nature and compelling it to answer. The phenomenological and suppressing hypotheses seeks to devise techniques of observations, description, and classification which will permit it to disclose structures and connections in nature which do not yield to experimental techniques.

Idea was written with a view to clearing up the distinction between phenomenological psychology, which Husserl regarded as a legitimate, but secondary, science, and phenomenological philosophy, which, he was prepared to maintain, is the foundation of all science. When a sociologist or psychologist conducts a phenomenological investigation, he puts aside all the usual theories and assumptions which have governed research in that field; but he cannot rid himself

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of all presuppositions (such as, for example, the belief in the existence of the external world, the constancy of nature, etc.). As Plato saw, every science (except philosophy) must proceed upon some assumptions. To fulfil its promise, the phenomenological approach must bring us at last to an absolutely presupposition-less science.

The phenomenological approach in sociology can be detected in earlier periods of the discipline's development, but only in the third quarter of this century has it become a major theoretical and methodological school of thought gathering prominent and numerous followers and making grand efforts to contribute to the science. The development of phenomenological sociology questions the empirical foundation of sociology, thereby challenging the adequacy and meaningfulness of traditional sociological knowledge. If phenomenological sociology is to have any claim to a distinctive perspective and any relationship to Husserl's phenomenology, Timasheff says that 'it must focus on the analysis of the structure of consciousness and relationship of the consciousness of the individual to the social fabric'.

It should be emphasized at this point that Husserl actually knew little of the concrete or conceptual problems of the social and behavioural sciences. Yet, even though there is strong sentiment in certain philosophical as well as sociological circles that phenomenological sociology is simply not possible, there is a vocal, literate and growing body of sociologists who are settling about the development of just this kind of approach, building primarily on the work of the founder of phenomenological sociology, or at least responsible for the introduction and development of the sub discipline on American soil. In his work, he attempted to clarify Max Weber concept of 'action' and his method of 'ideal type' construction. Before we discuss Schutz's contribution, it should be pointed out that early philosophically inclined sociologists in Europe had already begun to explore some of the issues addressed in phenomenology, particularly the German Sociologist Alfred Vierkandt (1867-1952), and the Frenchman Jules Monnerot of the same period. Vierkandt, whose books include *Natural and Cultural People* (1895). And *Theory of Society* (1922), believed that society is the sum total of human interaction and his method, called 'ideational abstraction' consisted of a quest for basic irreducible concepts clarified through contemplation, the emphasis on the 'irreducible' and 'contemplation' plays heavily in Schutz's work. Monnerot, author of *Social Facts are not Things* (1946), was rabidly anti-Durkheimian as suggested in the title of his book. His work consisted of a study of social situations which precipitate immediate experiences analysable by sociology—a sociology built upon the conviction that 'social facts', as Durkheim called social phenomena, are really just humanly defined and perceived 'conditions' or situations, thus factual only in the sense that humanly contrivances might be considered facts.

Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) was a social philosopher who fled to Germany in 1939 to escape the Nazis. Gifted and talented in banking and ingenuity, Schutz took a daytime position in a New York City bank to support himself and taught social philosophy classes in the evening at the New School for social research in

1943. Nine years later, he became professor of sociology and philosophy and continued to teach at the New School until his death in 1959. Schutz is generally credited with introducing phenomenology to American sociology. He assigned central importance to the meaning individuals impart to situations in everyday life and adapted Husserl's philosophy to sociology as well as incorporated Weber's concept of Verstehen or subjective understanding into his system. In his attempt to apply Husserl's phenomenological philosophy to social science problem, Schutz found that Weber's concept of 'verstcher' fitted nicely with his own emphasis upon individual consciousness. Schutz fundamentally believed that the 'experience and assumption of shared meanings built the foundation which made social life possible.

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12.3 ALFRED H. SCHUTZ

On 13 April 1899, Alfred Schutz was born to a middle-class family in Vienna, Austria. His father died before his birth and Schutz's mother and step father who was a bank executive took care of him. He graduated from high school during World War I. The Austro-Hungarian army was in short supply of officers, so the Schutz joined the army at the age of seventeen. After his training, he commissioned Schutz as an officer and sent him to the Italian front.

In late 1918, Schutz came back from the army to his city, but the city to which he returned was not the one he remembered. Schutz founded Vienna in a state of economic deterioration, with a large segment of its population suffering from starvation. However, out of necessity Schutz joined the University of Vienna, where he admitted himself in the Viennese Academy of international trade from 1919 to 1920. After developing a well-established and a good career in international banking, in 1926 Schutz married Ilse Heim. The threat of Hitler's rise in Germany in 1933 caused Schutz and many other Viennese intellectuals to flee Austria in order to seek asylum in allied countries. Consequently, Schutz and his family relocated to Paris in 1938. Schutz worked as an international lawyer in a company and moved to the United States in 1939. Where he became the member of the faculty of the New School. Schutz received a substantial amount of assistance from his wife Ilse, who transcribed his working notes and letters from his taped dictations. Schutz died at the age of 60 in New York City on 20th May 1959.

Schutz principal philosophical work consisted of the application of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology to the problems of social reality, while his main methodological contribution was an attempt to relate phenomenological concepts to the sociology of Max Weber. Schutz point of view was that the task of the phenomenological philosopher concerned with social reality is to uncover, describe, and analyse the essential features of his mundane world; and consequently all of his writings, beginning with '*The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1932)' take the reality of everyday life as a point of departure and as a subject for detailed examination.

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Schutz published dozens of essays in the United States and in his last decade he began working on his second book. Before his death, however, he was only able to outline an arrangement of passages from various essays, eventually fleshed out by Thomas Luckmann in two volumes.

The Inter Subjective World of Everyday Life

In his major work, *'The Meaningful Structure of the Social World'* Alfred Schutz sought to trace some of the main concepts of social sciences to their roots in the fundamental characterizes of consciousness. Pointing thereby to a connection between Weber's 'Verstehende soziologie' and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

The social world of everyday life, Schutz tells us, 'is always an inter-subjective one. This is the world, share with my fellowmen, with others who also experience and interpret it. My world is therefore never wholly private; even in my consciousness, find evidence of others, evidence that my unique biographical situation is not wholly the product of my own actions. Each of us is born into a historically given world that is simultaneously natural and socio cultural. The world existed before I came into it and will continue to exist long after I am gone. Each of us is an element in the life situation of others, just as they are in ours. I act upon them and they act upon me, and we all experience of this everyday world in a similar fashion. Our experience of this everyday world is a common-sense one, for each of us takes for granted that our fellow men exist, that they live in the same natural, historically given, socio-cultural world as we do.'

Knowledge of Others

Schutz spells out the essentials of the common-sense, taken-for-granted, everyday world an elaboration of Husserl's 'Lebenswelt'. He employs as well Husserl's notion of presentation to explain how we come to know others and communicate with them. 'Only the other's body is presented to me, not his mind. His conscious life is appresented, not presented. My consciousness receives indication of his conscious life and experiences mainly by visual perception of his body, his actions and the actions of others upon him.' These well-ordered indications Husserl calls a system of appresentations, which, in then, he regards as the source of sign system and ultimately, of language. In short, we grasp the physical body of the other as expressing his spiritual I—a concept roughly equivalent to scheler's 'person' and the symbolic interactions 'self'.

This process is not unlike the one in which we find meaning in any cultural object, whether this be a book, a tool, or a house. When I read a book it is clearly not to the book as material object that I orient myself, but to its meaning. It is the spiritual meaning of the object that we appresentationally apperceive and not its actual appearance. We constitute the object in accordance with the meaning it has for us.

Reciprocity of Perspectives

When Schutz speaks of the micro world of ‘face-to-face’ interaction, he also uses terms like ‘world within my actual reach’ and ‘world within my manipulatory zone’. The concepts, if not the actual words, are also employed by William James and George Hubert Mead.

‘This micro world, the sector that comes within my actual reach and becomes by here, is not the same as that which comes within your reach, that is, your here is my there. True, our worlds may overlap, so that some things and events may be within the manipulatory zone of both of us. Yet, the objects and events will appear differently from our respective standpoints as to their direction, distance, perspective, adumbration, etc. . . .’, the common sense, taken-for-granted attitude we share is that we could exchange places and that if we did so each would then see the world just as the other did previously.

Schutz reminds us however that the ‘interchangeability of stand points’ is an idealization. Even in the relatively simple micro world. For although, it is true that we can often reciprocally exchange our stand points and hence, our perspectives, at least for practical purposes, there is also some inevitable transcendence of each other’s world. Their respective system of relevance, resulting from their biographically unique situations, can never be totally congruent; there is however, still another form of transcendence that becomes evident with the ‘we–relation’. This phenomenon says Schutz, belongs to the realm of meaning transcending everyday life and can only be grasped symbolically.

Multiple Realities

Here, Schutz modifies William James notion of ‘sub universe’. James had suggested that anything that excites or stimulates our interest impresses us as real, and that the impression remains with us so long as it is uncontradicted. We experience many different kinds of realities or ‘sub universes’, the most important of which are the world of physical things, the world of science, of ideal relation, of ‘idols of the tribe’, of the supernatural, of individual opinion and finally, ‘sheer madness and vagary’. Given his psychological interest, however, James did not pursue the social implication of these differing orders of reality: this is precisely what Schutz wishes to do.

Finally, there is the world of scientific theory, which Schutz deliberately defines narrowly as activity aiming toward the observation and understanding of the world but not toward its mastery. The practical and ameliorative motives are not, strictly speaking, ‘an element of the process of scientific theorizing itself’.

12.3.1 Common-Sense Types and Social Science Types

Philosophers generally agree that all perception, even the simplest, is never purely sensory, but rather involves imagination and concepts. Seeing, hearing, touching,

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etc., are always meditated and accompanied by thinking or conscious activity. This is true of both the common-sense world of everyday life and science. It is an error, then, to assume that we see the world immediately and directly. What we see is not at all the so-called 'concrete' or 'actual' world for the most rudimentary common-sense perception involves highly complex abstraction. What we see is never just a 'thing', 'out there', 'as it is'. It is rather a thought object contributed by our consciousness. He who fail to bear this in mind, be he everyman or scientist, commits what Alfred North Whitehead called the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness'.

All knowing then, is mediated by intellectual counteracts, for it involves generalization, idealization and abstraction. In these terms the so called 'facts' that are sometimes described as 'speaking for themselves' never do so, but are always carry meaning and are inevitably selected, interpreted, abstract facts.

Ideally, it is the natural scientist himself who selects his problems and decides what aspects of reality to study. The facts are not preselected or reinterpreted by the subjects of his inquiry, since meaning is not intrinsic to nature mindless objects he studies.

For Schutz, the social sciences present difficulties that may be overcome through specific methodological devices. In this respect he follows Weber, supplements Weber's typology of action with phenomenological insights.

The Typically of Everyday Experience

The world of each of us has always been pre-experienced and reinterpreted, so that our knowledge of the world is always based on the experience of predecessors as well as our contemporaries. This becomes our taken-for-granted unquestioned 'though at any time questionable stock of knowledge at hand'.

What happens here as elsewhere is that 'I' select only certain aspects of the type that are of interest and relevance to me and ignore the other aspects. The key terms are 'interest' and 'relevance'. You and I occupy different positions in the socio-cultural world and, accordingly, our interests and systems of relevance differ. Despite our differing locations, however 'we' tend to assume that (i) our standpoints are interchangeable and that (ii) Our systems of relevance are congruent 'for all practical purpose'. All who are included in the 'we' take these assumptions for granted and idealize them.

With these assumptions knowledge no longer appears as 'yours' or 'mine' or 'theirs', from the respective standpoints of our biographically unique situations. Rather, it appears as 'everyone's knowledge', 'objective and anonymous' knowledge, independent of our standpoint and situations. Indeed, much of our knowledge of everyday life consists of such commonly accepted, practical, and efficient ways of coping with environment.

‘In-Order-To’ Motives and ‘Because’ Motives

‘In-order-to’ motives clearly refer to a future state that an actor wishes to bring about by his actions. ‘Because’ motives, on the other hand, refer to the past. They determine, in some sense and in some measure, the actor act as he does or did. In the course of his action, the actor is only conscious of his ‘in-order-to’ motives, but not his ‘because’ motives. The latter he becomes aware of only after he has completed the act or its initial phases. This awareness is acquired *ex post facto*, by means of reflection. ‘But then’ Schutz reminds ‘the actor is not acting anymore; he is an observer of himself’.

In social interaction—for example, questioning and answering—the ‘in-order-to’ motives of one actor become the ‘because’ motives of the other. We know that typically our questions will cause the other to answer and provide the information or object we need. In some cases, the motives are simple and obvious.

All sciences, the physical as well as the social, employ abstractions and study typical, not unique events. The social sciences are justified in doing so since everyman in every facts, events, and experiences.

For Schutz, the special problem and responsibility of the social sciences is ‘to develop methodological devices for attaining objectives and verifiable knowledge of a subjective meaning structure’. This require a special posture on the social scientist’s part as well as systematic attention to the relation of the typical constructs of common sense to those of social science. The social scientist is therefore a special case of disinterested observation. Schutz emphasize that disinterestedness is a matter of attitude. It is an ideal posture towards which the social scientist should strive. Approximating this posture requires that one apply what Schutz’s phenomenological predecessors prescribed: one reflects on one’s position, situation and experience in the social world and the values and interest resulting from them.

The Constructs and Models of Social Science

Exploring the source of danger, Schutz reviews the typical procedures of social scientists. To explain certain observed actions he constructs ideal—typical causes of action along with the accompanying hypothetical actors whom, he endows with equally hypothetical consciousness. All this he does relates to his specific scientific problem.

Schutz suggests some general and programmatic postulates. These are intended to guide the social scientist in the construction of models that will enable him to deal objectively with human actions and their subjective meaning. At the same time, the postulates alert the scientist to the danger in constructing models that depart so far from the common-sense thought objects of everyday life that they are inconsistent with them. Finally, it should go without saying that the postulates are in no sense intended to replace the basic canoes of scientific procedure, but to complement them. Schutz lists three postulates, such as follows:

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1. **The postulates of logical consistency:** The scientist's system of constructs should have the utmost clarity and distinctness as well as full compatibility with formal logical principles. It is this formal logical character that distinguishes scientific from common-sense thinking.
2. **The postulates of subjective interpretation:** This underlies Weber's conception of the main task of sociology; the scientific's concepts and model's should enable him to refer human actions and its consequences to the subjective meanings of the actors involved.
3. **The postulates of adequacy:** This postulates enjoin the scientist to strive for consistency between his constructs and those of common-sense experience of the social reality.

Schutz's work is mainly programmatic; apart from the ideas summarized here, there is remarkably little development or application of the method he advocates.

Check Your Progress

1. List one major work of Alfred Schutz.
2. What do you understand by the term 'sub-universe'?
3. Differentiate between 'in-order-to' and 'because' motives.
4. List the three postulates by Schutz.

12.4 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY: PETER BERGER AND THOMAS LUCKMANN

The term 'Social Construction' was introduced by Peter L. Berger, Professor of Sociology at Boston University and Thomas Luckmann, who is at present Professor of Sociology at Boston University. These two professors were highly influenced by the work of Alfred Schütz, an Austrian philosopher and social phenomenologist. The central notion of this term caters to the belief that people and groups who interact in a social system create over time, notions or mental representations of each other's actions. Also, these notions ultimately become accustomed into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles become available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are believed to be institutionalized. In the process, meaning is rooted in knowledge and people's conceptions (and beliefs) of what reality is lying in the institutional fabric of society—referring 'reality' to be fashioned socially.

People and groups who interact have an understanding of their respective perceptions of reality which is related and as they act upon this understanding, their common knowledge of reality becomes emphasised. The information about

habituation, institutionalization and sociology of knowledge are presented as portions of an objective reality, mainly for forthcoming generations who were not involved in the novel process. Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism has also drawn influence from phenomenology that hypothesizes all kinds of knowledge like the most basic, taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of daily reality is derived from and maintained by interactions in the society. The social construction of reality with its philosophical repercussions explains these present topics of habituation, institutionalization, objectivation and sociology of knowledge in relation to biological suggestions. The International Sociological Association in 1998 has recognized *The Social Construction of Reality* as the fifth-most significant sociology book of the 20th century. Earlier theorists (Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim, Werner Stark, Karl Marx and Max Weber), often emphasised much on scientific and theoretical knowledge.

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12.4.1 Habitualization, Institutionalization and the Sociology of Knowledge

The three main notions discussed in the book, *The Social Construction of Reality* are—habitualization, institutionalization and sociology of knowledge.

1. Habitualization: It implies that a particular action may be performed in the future with the same intensity and effort. It further provides direction and specialization for human activities. Habitualization highlights the significant psychological advantage to humans that choices are limited. As a result, an individual is relieved from the burden of 'all those decisions,' which might be taken instinctively. Hence, this provides an environment in which minimum decision-making would be required. That is to say, habitualization is the centre stage for negotiation and innovation. The ontological and experimental derivation showcases that social order exists only within living beings as activities or products. This cannot be derived physically or from scientific data but contributes to the natural environment through specific factors for example, economic or technological arrangements. Social order is not 'nature's part and cannot be derived from the laws of nature.'

In terms of the meaningful activities carried by out individuals, habitualization lays focus on the numerous situations that predefine their activities such that their substitutes of conduct can be given due emphasis. Hence, it is not vital that each situation should be defined as new and that too, step by step. These processes of habitualization precede any institutionalization. Factually, an important aspect of habitualization of human activity is its coincidence with the latter's institutionalization. The question then arises: how do institutions arise? As an objective reality, institutional world covers events of life not accessible to any individual's biographic memory. The biography is considered as an episode taken from objective history of society referring 'Institutions as historical and objective facticities facing individuals as undeniable facts.' The institutions external to any individual's locus are persistent in their reality, whether liked or disliked by him. He cannot avoid them since they have intimidating power within themselves by sheer force of facticity using control

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mechanisms that are usually attached. Large portions of social world are incomprehensible, oppressive in their opaqueness and cannot be understood through speculations and self-analysis by the individuals. They must learn from the environment and from going outside regularly. This is true even for the social world that exists as a living reality and potentially understandable in a possible manner in case of the natural world.

2. Institutionalization: This takes place whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. These are typifications of habitualized actions that comprise institutions and are always shared and are available to all the members of the specific social group in question, while the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as specific actions. The institution puts forward that actions of type X will be executed by actors of type X. For instance, the institution of law postulates that beheading shall take place in specific ways in particular situations, and that particular types of individuals will do the chopping (say, executioners, or those who have been designated by an oracle). Institutions further imply historicity and control.

Institutions are the products of history. In this manner, institutions provide sufficient understanding of the historical processes which contributed to their establishment. Moreover, institutions control human conduct by establishing predefined patterns of conduct, taken in one direction. It is imperative to lay focus that this controlling streak is intrinsic in institutionalization and is defined as 'social control'.

An institutional world can be interpreted as an objective reality with historical backgrounds of individuals. This may be anticipated as an episode located within the objective history of the society. The institutions are undeniable facts for individuals confronting them with their historical and objective facts. The institutions external in nature become persistent in their reality, whether liked by individuals or not. They also resist his attempts to change or evade them through their powerful force over him, both in themselves, by the sheer force of their terms and regulations along with the control mechanisms.

The objective reality of institutions is not reduced but existing as external realities in modern society that must be learnt and knowledge should be acquired about their nature. This is true as every social world presents a humanly produced reality. The social world confronts the individual who may have become equivalent to the reality of the natural world for communication of social formations to new generations. In early stages of socialization, younger people are not proficient enough of differentiating between the objectivity of natural phenomena and objectivity of social formations. The institutions are permanent and obvious which justifies that institutionalization of children enhances objectivity of world for them as the latter would be reflected back on them. Empirical evidence further proves that the institutional world transmitted by most parents has historical and objective reality character and the process simply strengthens the sense of reality of parents of getting and doing things that becomes a firm belief for them.

One needs to acknowledge the objectivity of the institutional world that may appear as a massive, humanly produced, constructed objectivity. The process by which the externalized products of human activity acquire the charisma of objectivity is 'objectivation'. There are several stages in a continuing dialectical process, which is 'Internalization' by which the objectivated social world forcibly brings out consciousness in the course of socialization. The principal relationship of these three dialectical moments in social reality relates to an indispensable characterization of the social world that describes society as a human product—*Society is an objective reality and Man is a social product*. These may be left misrepresented, if anyone is disregarded in an evaluation of the social world. Institutional development comprises the formation of logic, but this is not constant or independently determined. These are socially shared among individuals that participate in an institution by developing biographies that are unswerving with the system. The roles portrayed in these biographies are formed by the same process of institutionalization as represented by the social order. Likewise, the symbolic universes are a level of legitimization of an institution. These universes are products of a gradual objectification, sedimentation, and accumulation of knowledge with their historical connotations. These symbolic universes, in fact, order and categorize biographic and institutional knowledge.

3. The Sociology of Knowledge: This concept broadens the horizon much far beyond notions, which is largely the area of concern of other approaches. Marx contended 'that man's consciousness is derived by his social being.' Marx Ferdinand Scheler, a German philosopher, uses some specific terms, particularly 'ideal factors' (*Idealfaktoren*) and 'real factors' (*Realfaktoren*). The 'real factors' control the conditions under which certain 'ideal factors' can appear in history, but cannot influence the content of the latter. We can also say that society regulates the presence (*Dasein*) but not the nature (*Sosein*) of ideas. The society governs human knowledge and experience informing the individual to visualize the world that is socially pervasive and seems natural. This way of looking is the 'relative-natural world view' (*relativnatürliche Weltanschauung*)— a concept which denotes how the descriptions used here are about perspectives and views and very much similar approaches to models. After Scheler, Mannheim and Talcott Parsons have prominently influenced the sociology of knowledge. The sociology of knowledge embraces the relationship between human thought and the social context of its origin. The sociology of knowledge interprets the general problems from the sociological focus and that of the existential determination (*Seinsgebundenheit*) of thought as such. In these cases, the theoretical difficulties are same when the social factor is concentrated upon with the historical, the psychological or the biological as proposed determinative of human thought and also includes the extent to which thoughts reflect or are independent of the proposed determinative factors.

On the empirical level, the concrete relationship between thought and its historical summation needs to be interpreted in a correct manner. The sociology of knowledge takes up a problem originally posited by historical scholarship—in a

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narrower focus, to be sure, but with an interest in fundamentally the same questions. The sociological awareness about values and world views can be found in antiquity when it comes to Enlightenment— this awareness crystallized into a major theme of modern Western thought would, hence, be possible to make a good case for a number of significant problems of the sociology of knowledge.

The sociology of knowledge and its implications of everyday life are inter-subjective, phenomenological and empirical, but it is not scientific including pre-scientific or quasi-scientific methods. The approach to this is phenomenological. The consciousness must be comprehended as intentional like when individuals form attitudes toward things, have intentions toward them, and understand things through experience and perception. These experiences create understanding of how things work and operate according to causal logic. These are not scientifically accurate and how naive theories of physics become embedded in one's mind because they are emphasised by experience. The complex forms of knowledge whenever an economic surplus is built up, contemporary sociologists concentrate on subjects and their specialization that have been increasingly nullified with growing industrialization and mechanization. From the practical requirements of everyday life—sociologists within these exclusive bodies of knowledge are acclaimed experts in this or that sector of the societal stock of knowledge, they may even claim ultimate jurisdiction over that stock of knowledge in its entirety. They are, factually, universal experts. Since the universal experts operate on a level of substantial abstraction from the changes of everyday life, both others and they themselves may conclude that their theories have no relation whatsoever to the ongoing platonic life of the society, but it can have great socio-historical evidence, by virtue of the relationship between the reality-defining and reality-producing process.

The phenomenological analysis of everyday life and assertive nature of the ontological status of the phenomena is analysed to remember that our common sense contains innumerable pre- and quasi-scientific interpretations about everyday reality. If, we are to describe the reality of common sense, we must refer to these interpretations within phenomenological order. Consciousness is always intentional or directional not including consciousness experienced as belonging to an external physical world or apprehended this as an element of an inward subjective reality. For example, the individual phenomenologically may state that whether I (the first person singular, here as in the following illustrations, standing for ordinary self-consciousness in everyday life) am viewing the panorama of New York City or whether I become conscious of an inner anxiety, the processes of consciousness involved are intentional in both instances. The consciousness here is differentiated from the awareness state of anxiety and should not be discussed.

The stock of knowledge frames the areas of reality taking the routines of everyday work which are dealt with frequently. These routines structure the world that has its own logic, according to relevances of interactions having social value and meaning. The social construction reality is a shared phenomenon for overlapping worlds.

Finally, the existence of the institution and how reality is comprehended objectively in the social context is evocative of Foucault who states that institutions form rules and interpretations for understanding; the discourse of an institution is enclosing. The social world leads to habitualization, and slowly, habitualization gives way to institutionalization. Humans are naturally world-open, in that they can shift from one world of meaning to another with comparative easiness. However, institutions are closed, in the sense that the world of meaning communicated by an institution is encompassing and shuts out other worlds. There are potential attempts to put social construction of reality theory with the theory of emotions suggesting that together they may be confined to reflect meaningful biogenetic differences. As the social, political, historical and economic structure of society changes, there is consciousness to generate social outcomes, for example, racial inequalities to produce racial superiority. The analysis of the interrelations between institutional processes and the habituating activities, the standard versions of functionalist explanations in the social sciences and theoretical interpretation. A purely structural sociology is endemic and incidental to the intellectual itinerary of the empirical sociology of knowledge. This is more of a dialectical perspective upon the theoretical orientation of the social sciences. One should proceed from such assertions to specifications that are congruent with the great traditions of sociologists.

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Check Your Progress

5. Who coined the term 'social construction'?
6. What do you understand by the term 'Habitualization'?
7. Name the philosophers who have considerably influenced the concept of 'sociology of knowledge'.

12.5 HAROLD GARFINKEL'S APPROACH TO ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Given its Greek roots, the term ethnomethodology literally means the methods that people use on daily basis to accomplish their everyday lives. To put it slightly differently, the social world is seen as an ongoing practical accomplishment. People are viewed as rational, but they use practical reasoning in accomplishing their everyday lives. The emphasis in ethnomethodology is on what people do, whereas, in phenomenological sociology, it is on what people think.

However, while ethnomethodologists focus on action, it is action that implies and involves a thoughtful actor; ethnomethodology does not deny the existence of mental processes. Ethnomethodologists are critical of some varieties of sociological theory (for example structural functionalism and structural Marxism) that treat the actor as a 'judgmental dope'. While ethnomethodologists refuse to treat actors as judgmental dopes, they do not believe that people are 'almost endlessly reflexive,

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self-conscious and calculative'. Rather, following Schutz, they recognize that most often action is routine and relatively unreflective.

The study of common sense and the range of procedures and considerations involve the means by which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves.

We can get a better understanding of ethnomethodology by examining a recent effort by Harold Garfinkel to define ethnomethodology. Like Emile Durkheim, Garfinkel considers 'social facts' to be the fundamental sociological phenomenon. However, Garfinkel's social facts are very different from Durkheim's social facts. For Durkheim, social facts are external to and coercive over individuals; and those who adopt such a focus tend to see actors as constrained or determined by social structures and institutions and fail to exercise little or no independent judgment. Durkheim's social facts are macro-objective phenomena. While Garfinkel's social facts are micro-objective, that is, Garfinkel like Durkheim sees social facts as objective phenomena; but unlike Durkheim, Garfinkel sees them as existing at the micro-level. Along these lines, heritage sees ethnomethodology as focusing on the molecular and sub-molecular levels of social structure. To put it another way, ethnomethodology is concerned with the organization of everyday life, or as Garfinkel calls it 'immortal, ordinary society'. Pollner describes this as the extraordinary organization of the ordinary. To use more of Garfinkel's definition, such an organization is locally or endogenously produced and it is naturally organized.

In Maynard and Clayman's view, Garfinkel has sought a new way to describe the traditional concerns of sociology—the objective reality of social facts instead of as external and coercive in people's everyday lives. In focusing on this concerted work, Garfinkel is not focally interested in the cognitive processes necessary for this to occur, but rather in people's procedures, methods or practices.

Various aspects of Garfinkel's definition are oriented to the view that the use of these practical procedures is universal and inescapable—that is, they are, 'everywhere always, only, exactly, and entirely members' work with no time out, and with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing postponement or buy-outs. People cannot avoid using ethnomethods in their everyday lives.

Finally, Garfinkel sees these ethnomethods as 'reflexivity accountable' to understand this, we need to deal with two key concepts in ethnomethodology—reflexivity and accounts. By reflexivity the ethnomethodologists mean the process in which we all engage in to create social reality through our thoughts and actions. However, we are rarely aware of this process, usually because we conceal it from ourselves. When we say hello to someone and the person responds similarly, we are not conscious of the reflexive work being done by both parties. But when the other person scowls and walks away without returning and greeting, we became aware that we were trying to create a certain reality with our actions and that we failed.

Order in society stems, at least in part, from people's reflexivity, i.e., ethnomethodologists reject the idea that order comes from mere conformity to norms. Rather, it is the actor's awareness of their options, as well as their ability to anticipate how others are going to react to what they say and do, that helps make for order in the everyday world.

Accounts are the ways in which actors do such things to describe, criticize and idealize, specific situations. 'Accounting' is the process by which people offer accounts in order to make sense of the world. Ethnomethodologists devote a lot of attention to analyse people's accounts as well as the ways in accounts are offered and accepted (or rejected) by others. This is one of the reasons that ethnomethodologists are pre-occupied with analysing conversations. For example, when a student explains to his professor why he failed to take an examination, he is offering an account. The student is trying to make sense out of an event for the professor. Ethnomethodologists are interested in the nature of that account but more generally in the accounting practices (by which the student offers the account and the professor accepts or rejects it. In analysing accounts, ethnomethodologists, adopt a stance of 'ethnomethodological indifference'. That is, they do not judge the nature of the accounts but rather analyse them in terms of how they are used in practical action. They are concerned with the accounts as well as the methods needed by both speaker and listener to proffer, understand and accept or reject accounts.

Extending the idea of accounts, ethnomethodologists take great pains to point out that sociologists, like everyone else, offer accounts. Thus, reports of sociological studies can be seen as accounts and analysed in the same way that all other accounts can be studied. This serves to disenchant the work of sociologists, indeed all scientists. A good deal of sociology (in deed all sciences) involves common sense interpretation. Ethnomethodologists can study the accounts of the sociologist in the same way that they can study the accounts of the layman. Thus, the everyday practices of sociologists and all scientists come under the scrutiny of the ethnomethodologists.

Garfinkel's idea was that everyday methods are reflexivity accountable, we can get a better understanding of the means people are able to reflect on, the things that they do and as a result are able to offer accounts of those actions to others. It is joint reflexivity, as well as the offer and acceptance of accounts that helps to explain why the everyday world is orderly.

While, we are in the process of defining key terms, a few others need to be outlined here in order to enable the student to better understand ethnomethodology.

Indexicality is a concept derived from linguistics, where it describes the fact that sentences have different meanings in different contexts. 'It is raining' has different meanings: on the day of a long waited picnic, at the end of a drought, when the rivers are already overflowing their banks, or when one is driving and the temperature is freezing' (Handel, 1982). Extending this idea, ethnomethodologists

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adopt the view that all accounts—in fact, all expressions and practical actions—must be interpreted within their particular context. This means that ethnomethodologists must not impose their view of reality on actors. Instead, they must try to put themselves in the actor's place in order to understand what is being said and done.

Both a layperson and a sociologist use the documentary method, which involves an effort to identify 'an underlying pattern behind a series of appearances such that each appearance is seen as referring to, an expression of, or a document of, the underlying pattern (Wilson, 1970). Neither the layperson nor the sociologist can be content with the analysis of isolated events; both of them need to uncover the underlying pattern of which the event is a part of. The documentary method allows the layperson to better understand what is happening and to better orient his actions. For example, in interacting with others we trust them; and if our trust is misplaced, interaction will break down. To a sociologist, the documentary method permits a deeper understanding of what is transpiring in the social world.

In order to carry out their everyday lives, people must employ the 'et cetera principle'. According to this principle, all situations involve incomplete aspects that must be filled in by the participants in order to allow the situation to continue. Despite being confronted, with all sorts of gaps and ambiguities, we carry on our social lives. In order to do so, we allow unclear situations and information to pass unquestioned, on the assumption that they will be clarified later on. If we were to seek total clarity at every moment, social life would be impossible. As action proceeds, either the needed information is forthcoming or we actively seek it in order to allow us to clarify, and get a better grasp on, what is transpiring. It is because people accept the 'et cetera' principle, and are willing to proceed in the face of ambiguity in the hopes that things will become clearer, that social life is possible.

Finally, ethnomethodologists place great importance on natural language. This is the system of practices that allow people to speak, hear and witness the objective production and display of social life. A 'natural language' is not the linguistic elements that we use to communicate with one another but rather the non-linguistic elements of interpersonal communication. It involves such things as the need to take turns in conversations and to cope with disruptions in a conversation. Ultimately, it involves a concern with the basic structure of speaker-listener interaction.

Diversification of Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology was 'invented' by Garfinkel in the late 1940s, but it was first systematized with the publication of his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* in 1967. Over the years, ethnomethodology has grown enormously and expanded in a number of different directions. This led Don Zimmerman to conclude in 1978 that by then there was no longer only one kind of ethnomethodology, but several varieties. It is safe to say that ethnomethodology, its diversity, and its problems are likely to proliferate in coming years. After all, the subject matter of ethnomethodology

is the infinite variety of everyday life. As a result, there will be many more studies, more diversification, and further 'growing pains'.

Maynard and Clayman describe a number of varieties of work in ethnomethodology, but two stand out from our viewpoint. The first type is ethnomethodological *studies of institutional settings*. Early ethnomethodological studies carried out by Garfinkel and his associates took place in casual, non-institutionalized setting like the home. Later, there was a move towards studying everyday practices in a wide variety of institutional settings—courtrooms, medical clinics, and police departments. The goal of such studies is an understanding of the way people in these setting perform their official tasks and, in the process, constitute the institution in which the tasks take place.

Conventional sociological studies of such institutional settings focus on their structures, formal rules, and official procedures to explain what people do within them. To the ethnomethodologists, such external constraints are inadequate for explaining what really goes on in these institutions. People are not determined by these external forces; rather, they use them to accomplish their tasks and to create the institution in which they exist. People employ their practical procedures not only to make their daily lives but also to manufacture the institutions' products. For example, the crime rates compiled by the police department are not merely the result of officials following clearly defined rules in their production. Rather, officials utilize a range of common-sense procedures to decide, like whether victims should be classified as homicides or accidents. Thus, such rates are based on the interpretive work of professionals, and we need to be careful in interpreting official statistics.

The second, and most important, variety of ethnomethodology is *conversation analysis*. The goal of conversation analysis is 'the detailed understanding of the fundamental structures of conversational interaction' (Zimmerman, 1988).

Third, interaction in general and conversation in particular have stable, orderly properties that are achievements of the actors involved. In looking at conversations, ethnomethodologists treat them as if they were autonomous; separable from the cognitive processes of the actors as well the larger context in which they take place.

Fourth, 'the fundamental framework of conversation is sequential organization'.

Finally, and relatedly, the 'course of conversational interaction is managed on a return-by-return or local basis'. Here, Zimmerman invokes sociologist John Heritage's distinction between 'context-shaped' and 'context-renewing' conversation. Conversations are context-shaped in the sense that what is said in the present turn becomes part of the context for future turns.

Methodologically, conversation analysts are led to study conversations in naturally occurring situations, often using audio- or video-tapes. This method allows

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information to flow from the everyday world rather than being imposed on it by the researcher. The researcher can examine and re-examine an actual conversation in minute detail instead of relying on his notes. This technique also allows the researcher to do highly detailed analyses of conversations.

Conversations' analysis is based on the assumption that conversations are the bedrock of other forms of interpersonal relations. They are the most pervasive form of interaction, and a conversation 'consists of the fullest matrix of socially organized communicative practices and processes'.

We have tried to give some general sense of ethnomethodology in the preceding pages. However, the fact is that the heart of ethnomethodology lies not in its theoretical statements but in its empirical studies.

Check Your Progress

8. What is the main emphasis in ethnomethodology?
9. What are the two key concepts of 'ethnomethodology'?

12.6 ETHNOMETHODOLOGISTS' CRITICISMS OF TRADITIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Ethnomethodologists criticized traditional sociologists for imposing their sense of social reality on the social world. They believe that sociology has not been attentive enough or true knowledge to the everyday world that should be its ultimate source of knowledge. Enamoured of their own view of the social world, sociologists have tended not to share the same social reality as those they study.

The concepts used by traditional sociologists are said to distort the social world, to destroy its ebb and flow. Further, distortion is caused by sociology's reliance on scientific techniques and statistical analysis of data. Statistics simply do not usually do justice to the elegance and sophistication of the real world. The coding techniques used by sociologists when they translate human behaviour into their preconceived categories distort the social world. Furthermore, the seeming simplicity of the codes conceals the complicated and distorting work involved in turning aspects of the social world into the sociologist's preconceived categories. Sociologists are also seen as tending to accept unquestionably a respondent's description of a phenomenon rather than looking at the phenomenon itself. Thus, a description of a social setting is taken to be that setting rather than one's conception of that setting. Mehan and Wood argued that sociologists are prone to offer abstractions of the social world that are increasingly removed from the reality of everyday life.

Taking a slightly different approach, Don Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner (1970) argued that conventional sociology has suffered from a confusion of topic and resource. That is, the everyday social world is a resource for the favourite

topics of sociology, but it is rarely a topic in its own right. This can be illustrated in a variety of ways. For example, Roy Turner argued that sociologists usually look at everyday speech not as a topic in itself but as a resource with which to study hidden realities such as norms, value, attitudes and so on. However, instead of being a resource, everyday speech can be seen as one of the ways in which the business of social life is carried on—a topic in itself. Matthew Speier (1970) argued that when sociologists look at childhood socialization, they look not at the processes themselves, but at a series of abstract ‘stages’ generalized from those processes. Speier argued that ‘socialization is the acquisition of interactional competencies’. Thus, the ethnomethodologists must look at the way these competencies are required and used in the everyday reality of the real world.

Another analysis of childhood socialization, by Robert W. Mackay (1974), is even more useful as a critique of traditional sociology and the confusion of topic and resource. Mackay contrasted the ‘normative’ approach of traditional sociology with the interpretive approach of ethnomethodology. The normative approach is seen as arguing that socialization is merely a series of stages in which ‘complete’ adults teach ‘incomplete’ children the ways of society. Mackay viewed this as a gloss that ignores the reality that socialization involves and interaction between children and adults. Children are not passive, incomplete receptacles, rather they are active participants in the socialization process, because they have the ability to reason, invent and acquire knowledge. Socialization is a two-sided process. Mackay believed that ethnomethodological orientation ‘restores the interaction between adults and children based on interpretive competencies as the phenomenon of study’.

Don Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner (1970) cited other examples of the confusion of topic and resource. For example, they argued that sociologists normally explain action in bureaucracies by the rules, norms, and values of the organization. However, had they looked at organizations as topics, they would have seen that actors often simply make it appear through their actions, that those actions can be explained by the rules? It is not the rules but the actor’s use of the rules that should be the topic of sociological research. Zimmerman and Pollner then cited the example of a code of behaviour among prison convicts. Whereas, traditional sociology would look at the ways in which actors are constrained by a convict code, ethnomethodologists would examine how the convicts use the code as an explanatory and persuasive device.

Social order is not a reality in itself to the ethnomethodologists, but an accomplishment of social actors.

While, ethnomethodology has made enormous strides in sociology and has demonstrated especially in the area of conversation analysis, some capacity to cumulate knowledge of everyday life, there are some problems worth noting.

First, while ethnomethodology is far more accepted today than it was a decade ago; it is still regarded with considerable suspicion by many sociologists.

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They view it as focusing on trivial matters and ignoring the crucially important issues confronting society today. The ethnomethodologists' response is that they are dealing with the crucial issues because it is everyday life that matters most. Paul Atkinson sums up the situation: 'Ethnomethodology continues to be greeted with mixtures of incomprehension and hostility in some quarters, but it is unquestionably a force to be reckoned with when it comes to the theory, methods, and empirical conduct of sociological inquiry.'

Second, there is a strain in ethnomethodology in the micro-direction. That is, there are those who believe that ethnomethodology has lost sight of its phenomenological roots and its concern for conscious, cognitive processes. Instead of focusing on conscious processes, ethnomethodologists, especially conversation analysts, have come to focus on the 'structural properties of the talk itself' (Atkinson, 1988). Ignored in the process are motives and the internal motivations for action. In Atkinson's view, ethnomethodology has grown 'unduly restricted' and come to be 'behaviourist and empiricist'. In moving in this direction, ethnomethodology is seen as having gone back on some of its basic principles, including its desire not to treat the actor as a judgment dope.

Finally, there is a strain in ethnomethodology in the macro-direction. While, ethnomethodology obviously focuses on micro-level phenomena, some ethnomethodologists are worried about how they can be linked with a concern for larger social structures. Zimmerman, for example, some years ago viewed cross-fertilization with macro-sociology as an 'open question and an intriguing possibility'.

More recently, Pollner has urged that ethnomethodology return to sociology to understand those (taken for granted) practices in their larger context, 'mundane reason in terms of structural and historical processes'. Mundane reason, it is suggested is not simply the product of local work of mundane reasoners, for it is also shaped by longer term and larger dynamics. Some such cross-fertilization has been undertaken by people like Giddens (1984), who has integrated ethnomethodological ideas into his structuration theory; and Chua (1977) who has analysed the relationship between ethnomethodology and Marxian theory. More generally, Boden has outlined what ethnomethodology has to offer to the issue of the relationship between structure and agency. She argues that the findings of ethnomethodological studies are relevant not only to micro-structures but also to macro-structures. There is some hope that the institutional studies being undertaken by ethnomethodologists will shed light on the macro-structure and its relationship to micro-level phenomena.

Check Your Progress

10. What are the reasons behind the ethnomethodologists' criticisms on traditional sociology?
11. According to Zimmerman and Pollner, what is the difference between the ways of traditional sociology and ethnomethodologists?

12.7 PETER BLAU: PROCESS OF EXCHANGE, VALUE, NORMS AND SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

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Peter Michael Blau (February 7, 1918 – March 12, 2002) was an Austrian thinker who emerged as one of the most prominent American sociological thinkers in the second half of the 20th century. He is considered as one of the founding figures of the newly evolved sub-discipline of sociology known as ‘Organizational Sociology’. He completed his Doctoral thesis with R.K. Merton at Columbia University in 1952, laying an early theory for the ‘dynamics of bureaucracy’. He also served as the president of American Sociological Association (1972 - 73) and was also elected for the National Academy of Science (1980). His major contributions include the study of social exchange and the dimensions of social structures.

Founder of Organizational Sociology

Inspired by the Columbian Anthropologist Conrad Arensberg (1951), Peter Blau started his study of the human relationships by focusing on the behaviour of work groups through systematically recorded interaction patterns among the workers. Here, he focused more on the ‘white collar workers’ (as against most of other sociologists who were still concentrating on ‘blue-collar workers’ for their respective studies. Instead of developing his work (just like other sociological thinkers of the time) on informal interviews, case studies and observations, Blau was more interested in empirical study of the observable patterns at the workplace. The outcomes of his research were published in the form of a book entitled *Dynamics of Bureaucracy* (Peter Blau, 1955) and this is still considered as one of the classics in sociological studies.

Blau successfully constructed a solid research foundation for the field of Organizational Sociology. This sub-discipline was inspired by the empirical study of public and private organizations accommodating their property-related perspective. On the basis of his observations, he emphasized that people engage in social interaction simply because it holds some value for them, that is,

- (i) It is expected to bring out some positive outcomes (in the form of ‘value’) and
- (ii) It helps them to stay clear of the negative outcomes (in the form of ‘debts’).

This gives them ‘a sense of autonomy and privilege’. Blau indicated that for the same reason, people engage in economic transactions as well. The theory seemed quite convincing and that is why, later on, several other thinkers of the time like Coleman, Goludner, Lipset and Selznick joined him in this study.

Theory of Structural Differentiation

Blau attempted to develop his empirical studies on the basis of the complicated relationship observed between organizational size and bureaucracy to a detailed

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and unremarkable series of prepositions and. this was called the 'Blau's Theory of Structural Differentiation'. The fundamental propositions of this theory were as follows:

1. Structural complexity and differentiation increases along with the size of the organization. This increases pressure for further coordination and interaction.
2. With the increase in size, the scale (the average size of the working subunits in the concerned organization) increases. This phenomena is associated usually with administrative economics.

In this way, Blau has tried to establish a proper relationship between size and bureaucratization of the organization.

Theory of Social Exchange

It was in continuity to his previous theories of 'Organization Sociology' and 'Structural Differentiation', that Blau attempts to propose a more general interpretation of the kinds of interactions and relationships in society. This theory, later on came to be known as 'Theory of Social Exchange'. This theory was influenced by several prominent theories of the past such as:

1. Max Weber's study of 'Social Relationships',
2. Robert K Merton 'Middle-range Theory',
3. A behavioural analysis of 'Micro-economy', and
4. Theory of Utilitarianism

Here, Blau's work consistently keeps asking the question: *Cui Bono?* (Whose benefit is this?). For answering this seemingly obvious question, he proposes the micro-sociology of 'strategic relationship which later on leads to the development of the 'Rational Choice Theory'. He starts with the presumption that every social-interaction has some or the other value (benefit) for the people. He also attempts to understand the forms and sources of such value so as to understand the collective outcomes (for example, the distribution of power in the society).

He, further, argues that the people get engaged in social relationships simply for the reason that they are engaged (or wish to engage) in economic transactions. In other words, people come in interaction with each-other because they expect something from other people. Such social exchanges are usually more long-term than the normal economic exchanges.

Usually people get engaged in such a social-exchange relationship simply because of the reason that everybody wants to have 'value' and stay out of 'debt'. This want is not only because of altruism and reciprocity hidden in their nature, but also because they want to get the advantage of autonomy and potentiality in the form of acquisition of more-and-more power. In the words of Peter Blau himself, 'An apparent "altruism" pervades social life; people are anxious to benefit one-another and to reciprocate for the benefit they receive.' Then, he adds, 'But beneath this seeming selflessness, an underlying 'egoism' can be discovered; the tendency

to help others is frequently motivated by the expectation that doing so will bring social rewards.’ (Peter Blau, 1964, p.17)

In this way, he treats social relationships as some emergent phenomena, not mere collection of individual phenomena- and his approach towards the exchange theory was quite distinct from that of George Foreman’s (1961) on just this point. Every social action (just like some organizational behaviour) is governed by an egoistic intention (I should be benefitted) wrapped and hidden under the sheaths of apparent altruism (Let others be benefitted).

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Outcomes of the Study

Blau consistently maintained his focus primarily on the interpersonal patterns that might explain those found at larger scales (that is macro structures of organizations). Though the theory is relatively new, it asks a very vital question for sociology (especially in this study of organizational research) how does size matter for an interaction? Inspired by Michael story of ‘Oligarchy’ and Siemens inclination towards formal sociology, Blau started with the arguments about the implication of group-size and the rates of in-group and out-group interactions.

He attempted to justify his position by using various interesting real-life examples from distinct fields of the society. Presuming any random interaction study, he observed that in any organization, minority-groups will have more out-group relations than a majority-group. For instance, any marital relationship between a Christian and a Jew in America makes a bigger influence on the Jewish population in comparison to the Christian population. In another set of example, in one of the white-dominated colleges in America, if it is notified that hostel-rooms will be allotted on a random basis, there are fair enough chances that not only white students, but all black students will also get only white roommates. Naturally, in due course of time, the minority group (Black roommates) would be having more-and-more out-of-group social interactions in comparison to their white peers.

With the help of these examples, social thinkers began to construct a complex and systematic account of the influence of social structure (of population and the Related Groups’ size) on our social relationships and interactions. In this way, Blau tried to establish that this theory is spacious enough to establish reconciliation amongst differences. This theory also establishes that mutual interaction (in economics as well as in sociology) is not merely an issue of taste and preference, rather it is a product of the structure itself.

Critical Evaluation

The major contribution of this theory was that it gives a more proper account for homophily¹ - as an outcome of Blau’s theory, it was believed that social-interaction

¹ The notion of ‘homophily’ was coined by R.K. Merton to describe the common observation that people are drawn to others like themselves on the basis of their taste and personal preferences.

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and exchange is not merely a by-product of taste and preference, but of the organizational structure itself.

It was established that, most of the time, even individual tastes and preferences are structurally produced. An apt example can be given from the life of Peter Blau himself, who married two of his fellow sociologists- More than a matter of taste and preference, it was simply explained on the basis of this theory that the concerned social structure (in the times of Peter Blau) was such that sociologists were thrown to spend more-and-more time with other sociologist than with other people.

Check Your Progress

12. Who is the founding figure of organizational sociology?
13. What was the sub-discipline of organizational sociology inspired by?

12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *The Meaningful Structure of the Social World* is considered to be one of the major works of Alfred Schutz.
2. Sub-universe is known as anything that excites or stimulates our interest impresses us as real, and that the impression remains with us so long as it is uncontradicted.
3. 'In-order-to' motives clearly refer to a future state that an actor wishes to bring about by his actions. 'Because' motives, on the other hand, refer to the past. They determine, in some sense and in some measure, the actor act as he does or did.
4. Schutz lists three postulates, such as follows:
 - The postulates of logical consistency
 - The postulates of subjective interpretation
 - The postulates of adequacy
5. The term 'social construction' was coined by Peter L. Berger, Professor of Sociology at Boston University and Thomas Luckmann, who is at present Professor of Sociology at Boston University.
6. The term 'Habitualization' implies that a particular action may be performed in the future with the same intensity and effort. It further provides direction and specialization for human activities.
7. Scheler, Mannheim and Talcott Parsons are the prominent philosophers who have prominently influenced the sociology of knowledge.

8. The emphasis in ethnomethodology is on what people do; whereas in phenomenological sociology it is on what people think.
9. There are two key concepts of 'ethnomethodology' as understood by Garfinkel: *reflexivity* (the process in which we all engage to create social reality through our thoughts and actions) and *accounts* (the ways in which actors do such things to describe, criticize, and idealize, specific situations).
10. Ethnomethodologists criticized traditional sociologists for imposing their sense of social reality on the social world. They believe that sociology has not been attentive enough or true knowledge to the everyday world that should be its ultimate source of knowledge. Enamoured of their own view of the social world, sociologists have tended not to share the same social reality as those they study.
11. According to Zimmerman and Pollner, traditional sociology would look at the ways in which actors are constrained by a convict code, ethnomethodologists would examine how the convicts use the code as an explanatory and persuasive device.
12. Peter Michael Blau is considered as one of the founding figures of the newly evolved sub-discipline of sociology known as 'organizational sociology'.
13. The sub-discipline of organizational sociology was inspired by the empirical study of public and private organizations accommodating their property-related perspective.

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12.9 SUMMARY

- Unlike the more traditional approaches in sociological theory and methodology which emphasize the historical and functional character of social behaviour, phenomenological and ethno methodological sociology are interpretive approaches to social life which emphasize 'the need to understand social action from the point of view of the social actor.'
- The term 'phenomenology' as it is used by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in his most notable philosophical treatise, '*Ideas: Introduction to pure phenomenology* (1913)' designates first of all a principle of philosophical and scientific method.
- When a sociologist or psychologist conducts a phenomenological investigation, he puts aside all the usual theories and assumptions which have governed research in that field; but he cannot rid himself of all presuppositions (such as, for example, the belief in the existence of the external world, the constancy of nature, etc.).
- The phenomenological approach in sociology can be detected in earlier periods of the discipline's development, but only in the third quarter of this

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century has it become a major theoretical and methodological school of thought gathering prominent and numerous followers and making grand efforts to contribute to the science.

- In his major work, *'The Meaningful Structure of the Social World'*; Alfred Schutz sought to trace some of the main concepts of social sciences to their roots in the fundamental characterizes of consciousness.
- Schutz spells out the essentials of the common-sense, taken-for-granted, everyday world an elaboration of Husserl's 'Lebenswelt'. He employs as well Husserl's notion of presentation to explain how we come to know others and communicate with them.
- When Schutz speaks of the micro world of 'face-to-face' interaction, he also uses terms like 'world within my actual reach' and 'world within my manipulatory zone'.
- Philosophers generally agree that all perception, even the simplest, is never purely sensory, but rather involves imagination and concepts
- For Schutz, the social sciences present difficulties that may be overcome through specific methodological devices.
- 'In-order-to' motives clearly refer to a future state that an actor wishes to bring about by his actions. 'Because' motives, on the other hand, refer to the past. They determine, in some sense and in some measure, the actor act as he does or did.
- All sciences, the physical as well as the social, employ abstractions and study typical, not unique events. The social sciences are justified in doing so since everyman in every facts, events, and experiences.
- The term 'Social Construction' was introduced by Peter L. Berger, Professor of Sociology at Boston University and Thomas Luckmann, who is at present Professor of Sociology at Boston University.
- People and groups who interact have an understanding of their respective perceptions of reality which is related and as they act upon this understanding, their common knowledge of reality becomes emphasised.
- The International Sociological Association in 1998 has recognized *The Social Construction of Reality* as the fifth-most significant sociology book of the 20th century. Earlier theorists (Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim, Werner Stark, Karl Marx and Max Weber), often emphasised much on scientific and theoretical knowledge.
- The three main notions discussed in the book, *The Social Construction of Reality* are—habitualization, institutionalization and sociology of knowledge.
- In terms of the meaningful activities carried by out individuals, habitualization lays focus on the numerous situations that predefine their activities such that their substitutes of conduct can be given due emphasis.

- Institutionalization takes place whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors.
- The objective reality of institutions is not reduced but existing as external realities in modern society that must be learnt and knowledge should be acquired about their nature.
- One needs to acknowledge the objectivity of the institutional world that may appear as a massive, humanly produced, constructed objectivity.
- This concept broadens the horizon much far beyond notions, which is largely the area of concern of other approaches. Marx contended ‘that man’s consciousness is derived by his social being.’
- The sociology of knowledge and its implications of everyday life are inter-subjective, phenomenological and empirical, but it is not scientific including pre-scientific or quasi-scientific methods.
- A purely structural sociology is endemic and incidental to the intellectual itinerary of the empirical sociology of knowledge.
- Given its Greek roots, the term ethnomethodology literally means the methods that people use on daily basis to accomplish their everyday lives.
- However, while ethnomethodologists focus on action, it is action that implies and involves a thoughtful actor; ethnomethodology does not deny the existence of mental processes.
- In Maynard and Clayman’s view, Garfinkel has sought a new way to describe the traditional concerns of sociology—the objective reality of social facts instead of as external and coercive in people’s everyday lives.
- Order in society stems, at least in part, from people’s reflexivity, i.e., ethnomethodologists reject the idea that order comes from mere conformity to norms.
- Garfinkel’s idea was that everyday methods are reflexivity accountable, we can get a better understanding of the means people are able to reflect on, the things that they do and as a result are able to offer accounts of those actions to others.
- Indexicality is a concept derived from linguistics, where it describes the fact that sentences have different meanings in different contexts.
- Ethnomethodology was ‘invented’ by Garfinkel in the late 1940s, but it was first systematized with the publication of his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* in 1967.
- Maynard and Clayman describe a number of varieties of work in ethnomethodology, but two stand out from our viewpoint. The first type is ethnomethodological *studies of institutional settings*.

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- Conventional sociological studies of such institutional settings focus on their structures, formal rules, and official procedures to explain what people do within them.
- Methodologically, conversation analysts are led to study conversations in naturally occurring situations, often using audio- or video-tapes. This method allows information to flow from the everyday world rather than being imposed on it by the researcher.
- Ethnomethodologists criticized traditional sociologists for imposing their sense of social reality on the social world. They believe that sociology has not been attentive enough or true knowledge to the everyday world that should be its ultimate source of knowledge.
- Taking a slightly different approach, Don Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner (1970) argued that conventional sociology has suffered from a confusion of topic and resource. That is, the everyday social world is a resource for the favourite topics of sociology, but it is rarely a topic in its own right.
- Another analysis of childhood socialization, by Robert W. Mackay (1974), is even more useful as a critique of traditional sociology and the confusion of topic and resource. Mackay contrasted the ‘normative’ approach of traditional sociology with the interpretive approach of ethnomethodology.
- Social order is not a reality in itself to the ethnomethodologists, but an accomplishment of social actors.
- While, ethnomethodology has made enormous strides in sociology and has demonstrated especially in the area of conversation analysis, some capacity to cumulate knowledge of everyday life, there are some problems worth noting.
- Peter Michael Blau (February 7, 1918 – March 12, 2002) was an Austrian thinker who emerged as one of the most prominent American sociological thinkers in the second half of the 20th century.
- Blau attempts to propose a more general interpretation of the kinds of interactions and relationships in society. This theory, later on came to be known as ‘Theory of Social Exchange’.

12.10 KEY WORDS

- **Lebenswelt:** Lifeworld (German: Lebenswelt) may be conceived as a universe of what is self-evident or given, a world that subjects may experience together. For Edmund Husserl, the lifeworld is the fundament for all epistemological enquiries. The concept has its origin in biology and cultural Protestantism.
- **Phenomenology:** Phenomenology is a broad discipline and method of inquiry in philosophy, developed largely by the German philosophers

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, which is based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events ('phenomena') as they are perceived or understood in the human consciousness, and not of anything independent of human consciousness.

- **Postulates:** A postulate is a statement that is agreed by everyone to be correct.
- **Empirical:** It is based on, concerned with, or verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic.
- **Panorama:** It refers to an unbroken view of the whole region surrounding an observer.
- **Itinerary:** It is a planned route or journey.
- **Historicity:** It is the historical actuality of persons and events, meaning the quality of being part of history as opposed to being a historical myth, legend, or fiction.
- **Ethnomethodology:** Ethnomethodology is a method of sociological analysis that examines how individuals use everyday conversation to construct a common-sense view of the world.
- **Reflexivity:** Reflexivity refers to circular relationships between cause and effect. A reflexive relationship is bidirectional with both the cause and the effect affecting one another in a relationship in which neither can be assigned as causes or effects.
- **Value:** In sociology, the meaning of value is different from meaning of value in economics or philosophy. For example, in economics values means price of the commodity, but in sociology, value means rights, dignity, rationality, individuality, equality, democracy etc. that guide our behaviour in many ways
- **Homophily:** The word is derived from the Ancient Greek word *homou*, (together) and *philia*, (friendship). It is the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others.

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12.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short biographical note on Alfred Schutz.
2. Discuss the contribution of Alfred Schutz in the field of social science.
3. Discuss the concept of phenomenology.
4. What is the meaning of the term 'social construction of reality'?
5. What do you understand by 'ethnomethodology'?
6. Write a brief note on ethnomethodologists' criticisms on traditional sociology.

7. What is a dramaturgical analysis?
8. Write a short biographical note on Harold Garfinkel.

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Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the term 'multiple reality' in your own words.
2. According to Schutz, the social sciences present difficulties that may be overcome through specific methodological devices. Explain this statement.
3. 'Institutions are the products of history.' Explain the statement.
4. 'Society is an objective reality and Man is a social product.' Analyse the statement.
5. Discuss the contribution of Harold Garfinkel in the field of social science.
6. Discuss the contribution of Peter Blau in the theory of social exchange. Which thinkers influenced him most prominently?
7. How does theory of 'organizational sociology' and 'structural differentiation' create proper grounds for the 'theory of social exchange'? Explain.
8. What were the outcomes of Peter Blau's contributions to the 'theory of social exchange'? Critically evaluate

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BLOCK - V
EXCHANGE OF POWER AND THEORY OF
STRUCTURATION

*Exchange Power and
George Homans*

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UNIT 13 EXCHANGE POWER AND
GEORGE HOMANS

Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 Relation Between Social Exchange and Social Status
- 13.3 Presuppositions of Homans' Theory of Social Exchange
 - 13.3.1 Study of Small Groups and Elements of Behaviour
 - 13.3.2 Conformers and Deviates
 - 13.3.3 Internal and External Systems
- 13.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.5 Summary
- 13.6 Key Words
- 13.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.8 Further Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learnt about Peter Blau's theories of exchange. In this unit, we will turn towards the theory of social exchange by George Homans.

Homans was an American sociologist best known for being the founder of behavioural sociology and the social exchange theory. The theory of social exchange is considered to be one of the most prominent theories in the field of social psychology. It starts with the presumption that: 'Every individual seeks to maximize his/her own personal gratifications. Further, he presumes that these rewards can only be found in social-interactions. That is why, people seek rewards in their interactions within a group.' This theory started with the writings of George Homans (1961), Peter Blau (1964) and Emerson (1962). This perspective develops on the grounds provided by the fundamental philosophical theory of 'utilitarianism' and the psychological theory of 'behaviourism'.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the basic concepts of social exchange theory

- Discuss George C. Homans' perspective and terminologies
- Describe the elements of behaviour and two types of systems

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13.2 RELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL EXCHANGE AND SOCIAL STATUS

As discussed in the introduction, George Casper Homans (August 11, 1910 - May 29, 1989) was an American Sociologist widely regarded as the 'founder of Behavioral Sociology' and 'the Social Exchange Theory'. Homans is best known for his research in 'social behaviour' and his works including *The Human Group*, *Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms*.

For George Homans, the fundamental processes of social behaviour depicting any social interaction (power, conformity, status, leadership, justice etc.) should be the primary content of every study. Here, George Homans focuses primarily on how this theory contributes to understand the various social phenomena that create micro and macro-structures in the society.

At the initial stage, Homans explains the different roles played by the actor in the different settings. He also tries to understand the different social structures being constructed in the process of exchange-relations and how such structures control and promote the actors to exercise their role and power in the societal set-up. It is important to understand here whether these social exchanges are inevitable/negotiated ones or are the reciprocal ones. In this way, this theory plays an important role in understanding the relationship between social-exchange and social status.

13.3 PRESUPPOSITIONS OF HOMANS' THEORY OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE

Homans is of the opinion that every social behaviour may be explained with reference to the context in which the person is interacting. While Peter Blau attempted to analyse the emergent properties of social systems, Homans depicts social exchange as the exchange of social activities between two-or-more persons. For this, he prefers to study elementary social behaviour in small groups and analyse what would happen when a very small group of two or three individuals is taken into account. He emphasizes three presuppositions:

1. The propositions acquired from the real-life conditions cannot be inconsistent with those acquired through a laboratory experiments. In other words, the outcomes derived from the laboratory conditions may aptly be applied in the society. Though such a consistency has not been established in any systematic way up to now.
2. There should be some general propositions acquired from the outcomes of the laboratory experiments that may explain approximately some of the work of small groups in the field.

3. The propositions that hold good empirically in small groups may be derived from some set of even more general propositions.¹ Such derivations should be taken into account to further explain different stages in social behaviours.

All of the abovementioned presuppositions are based on the fundamental belief that every social interaction is necessary associated with some exchange of goods- material or non-material. In this way, this theory treats the discipline of sociology much closer to other related disciplines like economics. As economics is the study of exchange carried out under particular situations and attempts to analyse in terms of numerical measure of value, Homans is of the opinion that if the usefulness of any social theory is to be established, then any social behaviour should be studied in terms of such exchanges. Thus, he starts by treating human behaviour in terms of social transactions.²

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13.3.1 Study of Small Groups and Elements of Behaviour

Homans starts by taking a cue from B.F. Skinner's *Science and Human Behaviour* (New York, MacMillan Co. 1953), where the behaviour of an experimental animal such as a pigeon was carefully studied by the behavioural psychologists. As the pigeon realizes its surrounding environment (i.e. the bird-cage kept in the laboratory), it starts pecking the walls of the bird-cage. On some instances, when it happens to hit the specified target, the pigeon is suitably rewarded (in the form of getting corns from the researcher). And when such a practice is repeated time-and-again, it happens that the pigeon goes through *operant conditioning* and in due course of time, its behaviour gets *reinforced*.

It was observed this reinforcement works in a much complicated manner than it seems: if the pigeon is hungrier but gets relatively less amount of corn as reward, it pecks on the specified target more often and more strongly. But if the reward (corn, in this case) is provided every time in larger quantity, the pigeon gets satisfied and therefore the 'rate of emission' (performance) goes down.

Also, if the reinforcement does not take place for a long time, the behaviour might become extinguished. The emission rate sometimes also depends upon other factors such as the 'cost'. (For example, the fatigue which develops as a result of the continued work done may be considered as the cost here).

Now as a sociologist, Homan considers this experimental pigeon as a social individual engaged in a social exchange and thus, analyses his behaviour. In case of a small social group, if the behaviour of an individual (emission) gets enforced by some other individual(s), it becomes a part of his learning process and therefore gets repeated time-and-again. Each person in the group finds the others' behaviour

¹ Propositions that empirically hold good in small groups may be derived from some set of still more general propositions. "Still more general" means only that empirical propositions other than ours may also be derived from the set.

² Marcel Mauss' *Essai sur le don* (1925).

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as reinforcing in this process. Just like corn works as a reinforcer for the pigeon in the cage, similarly, the other person's behaviour acts as 'reinforcer for the actor'. Homans called it the 'value'. This seems to be the fundamental paradigm of elementary social behaviour.

Homans is of the opinion that such propositions of behavioural psychology may be applied successfully and appropriately in any social situation. He thinks that just like a pigeon, any increase in reinforcement increases the emission of the individual. In addition, the acquisition of satisfaction point or absence of reinforcers may lead to probability of decrease and sometimes, extinction /omission of some kind or the other. The problem, here, is not what a man's values are but what he has learned in the past and how much of value his behaviour is getting him now. The more he gets, the less valuable any further unit of that value becomes to him, and the less often he will emit behaviour reinforced by it.

Festinger and his colleagues in *Theory and Experiment in Social Communication* (Michigan, 1950) consider two kinds of reinforcing activity:

- (a) The 'symbolic behaviour' we consider as valuable due to its social approval, and
- (b) The activity valuable in some other way (such as doing something very interesting).

They also show how the 'cohesiveness' prevalent in a group functions as a kind of variable for any function. The more valuable the sentiment a member exchanges with others, the greater the average frequency of interaction of the members becomes. Therefore, it may be said that the more cohesive a group is, the greater the enforcement and the greater the reinforcement, the higher will be emission. In this way, members of a group can affect the behaviour of other members in the direction of rendering their activities more valuable for the group. But if a particular kind of emission is not rewarding enough for other members of the society, then their own work will also suffer in the form of sentiments, and in due course of time, it might lead to omission of such activity of the group.

In short, the propositions of behavioural psychology explain the social tendency towards certain proportionality with the value to others.

13.3.2 Conformers and Deviates

There are two kinds of member in a group called the 'Conformers' and the 'Deviates'. Conformers are the one whose behaviour is found valuable by other members of the group as conformity is a behaviour that coincides to some degree with other groups' standard or norms. Deviate is a member whose behaviour is not particularly valuable as a norm. It becomes the tendency of the group that as the members are satisfied with the conformers' behaviour, their interaction goes up, while the deviate is less interacted with and therefore there is pressure on him to change his behaviour. Such deviates get less chance of 'socio-metric choice' at the end of the experiment. For instance, if person X is interacting more often with

person Y, than with person Z, both at the initial and final stage of the study, then at least by a crude measure, the group may be called to be 'in practical equilibrium'.

These findings proved that the more 'cohesive' a group is, the greater the change its members can inculcate in the behaviour of other members of the group. That is, the more cohesive a group is, the larger the number of members that conform to its norms. And it does hold good.

The two practical outcomes which come out of such an experimental study are:

- (i) In a real life group, the more closely a members' activity conforms to the norms, the more interaction he receives from other members of the group, the more he is liked by them as well.
- (ii) The more a members' activity deviates from the established/confirmed norms, the less interaction he receives from other members of the group and the less liking he gets from them.

Homans explains it as the behaviour emitted by the person is either the 'opinion' or the 'change in opinion'. For any behaviour, the person learns to expect two possible kinds of reinforcement:

- (i) Agreement with the group gets the subject favourable sentiment (acceptance) from it, and the experiment was designed to give this reinforcement a higher value in the high-attraction condition than in the low-attraction one.
- (ii) The second kind of possible reinforcement is 'maintenance of one's personal integrity,' which a person gets by keeping his own opinion in the face of disagreement with the group.

In different degrees for different persons, depending on their initial positions, these rewards are in competition with one another: they are 'alternatives'. A person works either for getting social approval or to keep his personal integrity intact. These alternatives are not absolutely sparse goods, but it might be said (with due exceptions) that persons cannot acquire and achieve both at the same time.

13.3.3 Internal and External Systems

Later, Homans further added to his theory that the ingredients of social behaviour (interaction, sentiments, and activities) are to be considered in terms of a group's internal and external systems.

Every group is demarcated by a specific conceptual boundary that distinguishes it from its environment. Within this boundary all emergent interactions, sentiments, and activities are mutually dependent on the behaviour of the group members. For example, in an industry a number of workers may be performing work activities in the same room. This performance of their work activities makes it likely that they will engage in interaction. Furthermore, this interaction increases positive sentiment among the workers, which will increase their interaction even further. This set of relations forms the group's internal system.

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A group's external system is the physical and social environment that exists outside its boundary. This may consist of required or planned activities and interactions, as well as the physical setting. The primary system is mutually dependent on the secondary system. Thus, the pattern according to which the management of a factory lays out the physical equipment of a department may well affect the worker's interpersonal relations within it.

Outcomes of the Study

Homans' theory in small-group research establishes a time-tested connection between experimental studies and real-life studies. This, in turn, proves his presupposition that:

- (a) The propositions that 'empirically hold good' in experimental field will also hold good in real-life, and
- (b) These propositions might be derived from a still more general set. This can be done by reviving the theory of social behaviour-social behaviour as exchange.

Some of the statements of such a theory might be the following:

Social behaviour is an exchange of goods, that is, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige. Persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them. This process of influence tends to work out at equilibrium to a balance in the exchanges. For a person engaged in exchange, what he gives may be a cost to him, just as what he gets may be a reward, and his behaviour changes less as profit, that is, reward less cost, tends to a maximum. Not only does he seek a maximum for himself, but he tries to see to it that no one in his group makes more profit than he does. The cost and the value of what he gives and of what he gets vary with the quantity of what he gives and gets.

It is quite surprising to see how familiar these propositions are; it is surprising, too, how propositions about the dynamics of exchange can begin to generate the static thing we call 'group structure'. Of all our many approaches to social behaviour, the one that sees it as an economy is the most neglected, and yet it is the one we use every moment of our lives-except when we write sociology.

Critical Evaluation

Homans' primary objective was the social behaviour that emerged as a result of the social processes of mutual reinforcement (and in some cases, the lack of it). Group relations might get extinguished due to non-availability of proper reinforcement.

Two-way exchange, the main emphasis of his work, provided the grounds for most of his theoretical considerations of other significant sociological concepts such as distributive justice, practical equilibrium, social status, authority, power-relations, and solidarity.

Homans' theory was criticized primarily for two main reasons:

- (i) It was considered to be 'too reductionistic' in nature (that is, it borrowed the principles and experiments of psychology as the exact basis for explanation of sociological phenomena) and
- (ii) In interpreting the sub-institutional level of social behaviour, it underplayed the implications of the institutional and social processes and social-structures that evolve out of our social interaction.

In this respect, it is ironical that one of Homans' most significant contributions to social psychology has been his early treatment of the issue of distributive justice in social exchange relations. The irony derives from the fact that Homans was explicitly much less interested in norms since he was preoccupied with the 'sub-institutional' level of analysis in his study of elementary social behaviour.

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Check Your Progress

1. What is Homans best known for?
2. What should be the primary content of every study according to Homans'?
3. What are the two types of members in a social group?
4. What is a group's external system?

13.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Homans is best known for his research in 'social behaviour' and his works including *The Human Group, Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms*.
2. For George Homans, the fundamental processes of social behaviour depicting any social interaction (power, conformity, status, leadership, justice etc.) should be the primary content of every study.
3. There are two kinds of member in a group called the 'Conformers' and the 'Deviates'.
4. A group's external system is the physical and social environment that exists outside its boundary.

13.5 SUMMARY

- The theory of social exchange is considered to be one of the most prominent theories in the field of social psychology.
- Every individual seeks to maximize his/her own personal gratifications. Further, he presumes that these rewards can only be found in social-interactions.

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- This theory started with the writings of George Homans (1961), Peter Blau (1964) and Emerson (1962). This perspective develops on the grounds provided by the fundamental philosophical theory of ‘utilitarianism’ and the psychological theory of ‘behaviourism’.
- George C. Homans was an American Sociologist widely regarded as the ‘founder of Behavioural Sociology’ and ‘the Social Exchange Theory’. For him, the fundamental processes of social behaviour depicting any social interaction should be the primary content of every study. Here, he focuses primarily on how this theory contributes to understand the various social phenomena that create micro and macro-structures in the society.
- At the initial stage, Homans explains the different roles played by the actor in the different settings and tries to understand the different social structures being constructed in the process of exchange-relations and how such structures control and promote the actors to exercise their role and power in the societal set-up.
- Homans is of the opinion that every social behaviour may be explained with reference to the context in which the person is interacting. He emphasizes on three presuppositions:
 - (i) The propositions acquired from the real-life conditions cannot be inconsistent with those acquired through a laboratory experiments.
 - (ii) There should be some useful general propositions acquired from the outcomes of the laboratory experiments.
 - (iii) The propositions that hold good empirically in small groups maybe may be derived from some set of even more general propositions.
- Homans starts by taking cue from B.F. Skinner’s *Science and Human Behaviour* (New York, MacMillan Co. 1953), where the behaviour of an experimental animal such as a pigeon was carefully studied by the behavioural psychologists.
- As a sociologist, Homan considers this experimental pigeon as a social individual engaged in a social exchange and thus, analyses his behaviour.
- In case of a small social group, if the behaviour of an individual (emission) gets enforced by some other individual(s), it becomes a part of his learning process and therefore gets repeated time-and-again.
- Each person in the group finds the others’ behaviour as reinforcing in this process. The problem, here, is not what a man’s values are but what he has learned in the past and how much of value his behaviour is getting him now. The more he gets, the less valuable any further unit of that value becomes to him, and the less often he will emit behaviour reinforced by it.

- They also show how the ‘cohesiveness’ prevalent in a group also functions as a kind of variable for any function. The more valuable the sentiment a member exchanges with others, the greater the average frequency of interaction of the members becomes.
- It may be said that the more cohesive a group is, the greater the enforcement and the greater the reinforcement, the higher will be emission.
- The propositions of behavioural psychology explain the social tendency towards certain proportionality with the value to others. The two practical outcomes which come out of such an experimental study are:
 - (a) In real life group, the more closely a members’ activity conforms to the norms, the more interaction he receives from other members of the group and the more liking he gets from them too.
 - (b) The more a members’ activity deviates from the established/confirmed norms, the less In different degrees for different persons, depending on their initial positions, these rewards are in competition with one another: they are ‘alternatives’. A person works either for getting social approval or to keep his personal integrity intact. These alternatives are not absolutely sparse goods, but it might be said (with due exceptions) that persons cannot acquire and achieve both at the same time.
- Homans further added to his theory that the ingredients of social behaviour (interaction, sentiments, and activities) are to be considered in terms of a group’s internal and external systems.

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13.6 KEY WORDS

- **Reinforcer:** A reinforce is a stimulus or event which, when it follows a response, increase the likelihood that the response will be made again. It can of two types: positive and negative.
- **Conformer:** It means the social phenomena to act in accordance or harmony; comply or conform to rules, to act in accord with the prevailing standards, attitudes, practices, etc., of society or a group.
- **Deviate:** It means the social phenomena to act against or violate social norms, including a formally enacted rule (e.g., crime), as well as informal violations of social norms (e.g., rejecting folkways and mores).
- **Equilibrium:** In sociology, a system is said to be in social equilibrium when there is a dynamic working balance among its interdependent parts. Each subsystem will adjust to any change in the other subsystems and will continue to do so until an equilibrium is retained.

13.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short Answer Questions

1. Discuss the value of reinforcement for establishing a person's behaviour in a social group.
2. Distinguish between a conformer and a deviate
3. How do you distinguish between an internal and external system.

Long Answer Questions

1. Critically evaluate George Homans' theory of exchange power and elements of behaviour.
2. According to George C. Homans, 'The application of experimental psychology for the explanation of social behavior as an attempt worth taking.' Discuss.
3. All social interactions may be explained in terms of reinforcements, values and norms of the group. Do you agree? Give your opinion

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UNIT 14 THEORY OF STRUCTURATION, MICHEL FOUCAULT'S POSTMODERNISM AND THE IDEAS OF DERRIDA

*Theory of Structuration,
Michel Foucault's
Postmodernism and the
Ideas of Derrida*

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Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 The Theory of Structuralism
 - 14.2.1 Critique of Structuralism: Post-Structuralism
 - 14.2.2 Derrida and Deconstruction
 - 14.2.3 Ideas of Foucault
- 14.3 Postmodernism
- 14.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.5 Summary
- 14.6 Key Words
- 14.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.8 Further Readings

14.0 INTRODUCTION

The different schools of Post-Marxism (sometimes referred to as Neo-Marxism) started with a group of thinkers who expressed a desire to examine Marxist orthodoxy using methods of critical enquiry and employing tools of analytical philosophy and 'bourgeoisie social science' together. Since this movement started, the environment (in which they have directed their enquiries) has changed in several substantial ways:

- (i) Firstly, the political environment has shifted dramatically: the Soviet Union has disintegrated and a globalized form of capitalist society has evolved. Consequently, the 'egalitarian political project' has been withdrawn everywhere.
- (ii) Secondly, during the same period, several thinkers on the Left shifted their interest from serious reflection concerning class-conflicts, inequality and socio-political order towards other marginal and politically inconsequential agendas of literary theory, post-structuralism and deconstruction.
- (iii) Despite all adversities and lack of public support, these left-oriented thinkers neither surrendered to 'dogmatism', nor converted to 'apologists' for the prevalent order. Rather, they attempted to collaborate with the new

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'egalitarian political philosophy' of John Rawls, Amartya Sen and others employing tools of 'bourgeoisie' social science. This became their project to develop some realistic institutions to move their socialist project forward.

Despite all these efforts, there is a clear and visible rupture between these academic theorists and the wide social movement of the oppressed. There seems no real connection between the two that would have directed this theoretical understanding into some political agenda. Still they have preserved a sense that the conquest of the capitalist order is a temporary stage; they hope that as things looked different (around twenty years back), they may do so in future again. For now, it is mandatory that those who believe in the possibility of an egalitarian and democratic future should continue to work carefully and creatively towards establishing such future society.

At this juncture, it seems quite appropriate to ask, 'Whether the Post-Marxism is Marxism at all?' Here, we should see Late-Marxism as cherishing the egalitarian and democratic values of Marx, though at the same time, willing to abandon (wherever necessary) the Marxian interpretation of capitalism, his method of dialectic materialism and his prescriptions for the future. Now what remains should be called Marxism or not is a question which should be a concern for the historian of ideas rather than a philosopher or a political thinker.

The unit will also discuss the postmodernist ideas of French philosophers and social theorist Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the ideas of post-Marxist thinker
- Examine the theory of structuralism
- Explain the significant traits of post-structuralism and postmodernism

14.2 THE THEORY OF STRUCTURALISM

In 1980, there was a huge excitement in the intellectual world about the emergence of new schools of ideas and their concepts such as Postmodernism, Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction. All of these theories seem to offer a completely newer perspective for observing and then interpreting the world.

All these new schools seem to react against the conventional Western ideas and theories prevalent for the last hundreds of years. In order to be updated about recent developments in the field of sociology, it is expected that the fundamental understanding of these schools and their prominent thinkers should also be understood.

What is Structuralism?

In the early 1960s, the school of structuralism developed on the European Continent, especially in France. The first and the foremost thinker of Structuralism was **Claude Levi-Strauss** (1908-2009) whose new ideas were established on the proposed theories of John Paul Sartre. He started exactly from where Sartre had left, but he started by analyzing and attacking the ideas of Sartre through his famous work *The Savage Mind*. This intellectual position of Strauss was named as Structuralism.

The school of the structuralism starts with the basic premise that ‘if any phenomena has to be understood, then it has to be done only and only through the metaphor of language.’ Therefore, language is to be understood as a complete system (or structure), which is defined only in terms of itself. There is no other language to define of our language and there is no metalanguage to explain what exactly some language means. It is, therefore, a ‘self-referential system’. Just as in a dictionary where we understand one word through the other, while the other word is explained by some yet other word. The meaning, thus, is presented in the form of a set of structure. This is how the concept of structuralism is conceived.

This approach was considered as an attack on other conventional schools of thought, which believed that truth is dependent on some objective but hidden reality. For instance, the Church would say that the reality is hidden behind the appearance of this which only God can manifest. Even the Marxists argued that reality is to be understood through the analysis of the modes of production.

The second thinker of this school was **Roland Barthes** (1915-1980), who followed the tradition of Strauss by completely refuting the conventional idea that there is a hidden reality in the text which is known only to the author and reading the entire text is nothing but the reader’s attempt to unveil the hidden. Barthes out rightly rejected this idea by emphasizing that there is no hidden/veiled truth/reality in the text, which depends on author for its existence. Rather, he wrote about the ‘Death of the Author’ and proposed that a view of a text is available to all.

Taking cue from the above-mentioned thinkers, **Michel Foucault** (1926-1984) proposed that even science is to be understood in a social context before considering it in intellectual context. It was in this context that it emphasized that ‘Madness’ comes to scientific discoveries later. But primarily ‘it is a social invention’. It was he who, for the first time, claimed that the analysis of the system expects analysis of the interaction between different parts of the system. The ‘core issues’ cannot be understood properly while ignoring the ‘marginal issues’.

In this way, it can be established that one feature common to all the structuralists thinkers is their revolt against ‘foundationalism’ - questioning any belief or presumption considered to be so basic (foundational) that an entire set of theories, beliefs and opinions can be constructed on it. As against this perspective, these structuralists emphasized on the ‘relatedness of truth’. They clearly stated that

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truth is not to be acquired, invented, discovered, possessed or owned: Rather, it is something which is like a structure invented by the society itself. In short, it can be said that the structuralists stated that their methodology can analyse any phenomena by reducing them to binaries and studying the interrelationship between them.

14.2.1 Critique of Structuralism: Post-Structuralism

Before starting the discussion, it is necessary to mention here that there are several places where we would find overlaps and intermissions between the different strands of postmodernism and post-structural approaches to the study of society and culture. In fact, both of these can be treated as the 'blanket terms' containing various approaches within them.

As it is evident from the term post-structuralism itself, it refers to the approach which emerged after and as a response to structuralism. It is an attempt to get insight about the society and culture by critiquing and deconstructing social and cultural phenomena. It can be considered as a departure from Structuralism.

The poststructuralists emphasized that the meaning in language is open to diverse interpretations. In fact, different meanings can be assigned to a single text depending upon the context and the background. For this, the methodology of the Structuralism was believed to be monolithic and inadequate in nature. Post-structuralists criticize Structuralism on following grounds:

- (i) Structuralism is ahistorical.
- (ii) Its approach of applying the rules of language on society is doubtful.
- (iii) To consider that a word has a meaning-in-itself waiting to be discovered, is doubtful.
- (iv) The text is nothing but a connection between the subject and the structures, is doubtful.

Poststructuralist Response

As we have seen before, the Structuralists established that the linguistic, social and psychological structures govern the individual's behaviour- not the other way round. Such an approach was considered as a reconciliation of Saussure and Freud. It was as a response to this approach of structuralism that post-structuralism emerged. The basic postulates of post-structuralism are as follows:

- (a) Putting all phenomena under a single explanation.
- (b) Accepting a transcendental reality which overarches diverse realities.
- (c) Criticism of the Enlightenment view that separates Individual (Matter) from the Mind.

The poststructuralists accepted the 'individual' as a 'socially-engaged subject'. This subject:

- (a) occupies some space in sociological site,

- (b) is an actor in our everyday reality, and
- (c) finds his/her meaning in the social groups and social activities.

Due to this ‘transcendental inclination’ found in post-structuralism, it was often alleged to be ‘anti-human’ in nature. However, the poststructuralists claim that the vision of reality comes through the ruptures, mutations and fragmentations- it cannot be considered as the need of opposition of binaries. As such, this allegation of being ‘anti-human’ depends on structuralists’ binary understanding.

For post-structuralists, societal processes and cultural relations are not seen as opposition/ binaries, but bits-and-pieces that comprise the nature of reality. It is because of this argument that the poststructuralists reject any possibility of a ‘grand narrative’ and ‘meta-theories’. In other words, they try to look at the reality in their specificity, not totality. In the same fashion, the human body is also to be seen contextually (through time and history). Thus, the society and the individual are bound together by a complex linguistic relationship.

This approach rejects the earlier structuralists’ position/viewpoint that a thinkers’ task is to comprehend the reality only through language. For them (poststructuralists), reality constructs itself within the social-metrics and keeps on reproducing itself time-and-again.

Knowledge through Discourse

It was on the basis of above-mentioned discussion that the post-structuralism came to the conclusion that the subject can only express and details what he/she has experienced. It is to be noted here that this includes such experiences for which no language is structured up to now. That is why, they prefer different aspects of language like metaphors, irony and metonymy. Thus, ‘objectivity’ and ‘universality’ as emphasized in almost all of the earlier sociological theories and perspectives is rejected as being ‘illusion’. It is the loop of the meaning and its use which gives more about the subject rather than trying to understand it in its totality. That is why, according to Foucault, history is viewed as ‘happening by chance’.

14.2.2 Derrida and Deconstruction

Post-structuralism begins with Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) response to the structuralists’ approach better known as ‘deconstruction’ of language, society and culture. Derrida’s approach consisted in conducting readings of texts with an ear to what runs counter to the intended meaning or structural unity of a specific text.

While the structuralists opined that it is the structure which controls the man, Derrida was of the opinion that all structures can be seen as writings that are incompetent of controlling the subject. While structuralists find staticity in language (therefore in structure), Derrida finds language as continuously going through changes. Obviously, a structure formed out of language will itself be unstable and if such is the case, then how can it control the subject?

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In this way, deconstruction is considered as the critic, rejection and conceptual dissection of structuralism. Deconstruction is not about controlling the text, but about bring a change through it. Derrida feels that the text puts the author in the controlling position, and the need is to decentre it, so as to make the process open-ended and reflexive.

14.2.3 Ideas of Foucault

Michel Foucault was born in the year 1984. He was brought up in Poitiers, France. He is famous for his contribution to the concept knowledge, power, freedom and discourse. He was regarded as French philosopher and considered as strong critical social theorist. From 1960s onwards, he was directly associated with the theory of structuralism. He vehemently rejected the post-structuralist and post-modernist theory. His theory of knowledge was basically influenced by the writings of Nietzsche, the genealogy of knowledge. He stubbornly estranged from the concept of existentialist thinking. *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Prison* and *The History of Sexuality*, were the major outstanding contributions of Foucault's thought. With the help of this work, Foucault himself attempted to analyse the fact that mind control is most imperative in controlling the emotional attachment of man. It is more important than corporal penalty. Knowledge, power, and direct linkage between them are most important to analyse the sound reasoning of scientific knowledge.

Theory of Knowledge, Power and Freedom

Foucault first time discussed the concept of French epistemology in order to define the correct meaning of knowledge. The knowledge has the special meaning in the field of archaeology. He said that statements constitute the basic network of networks and it establishes the preconditions of utterances and propositions. Here, statements are called events. Foucault attempts to analyse the vast well organized dispersion of varied statements. It is otherwise called discursive formations. He is not entitled not to seeking to displace other ways of analysing them as null and void. He particularly defined the essence of renaissance and age of enlightenment in order to find out the true meaning of Knowledge.

Singular Importance in Knowledge

This philosophy of Foucault arose out of a conviction that any discourse on freedom as an attribute of social order is both unproductive and ultimately dangerous, as inevitably leads to the effacement of the concrete experience of knowledge and freedom and its replacement with an abstract principle of political order. It is the unease about the reduction of freedom to a political project in its name that motivates our engagement with the political philosophy of Michel Foucault—a thinker whose work has had a singular importance in the political thought of the twentieth century in illuminating both the expropriation of freedom by governmental rationalists and the plenitude of possibilities of freedom of knowledge that remain available to its subjects even in most adverse circumstances. In contrast to the

conventional questions of political theory, Foucault does not ask: 'Under what form of political order may freedom and knowledge thrive?' Knowledge is power has some logical justifications to achieve freedom. Instead he dismisses this very question is any already existing order or utopian (when the theorist draws a blueprint for a perfect order). Indeed, conservatism and utopianism are not as different as it is generally assumed, since the very utopia of establishing a perfect order, in which freedom would no longer be a problem is fundamentally conservative in its assumption of the possibility of a political system that corresponds with the natural state of humanity. Once this utopia acquires its topos and becomes a political project, it is capable of enormous sacrifices of freedom precisely in the name of its acquisition in the bright future. Simply put, any utopianism becomes conservative at the moment the utopian construction begins to be implemented. Instead of taking and asking the following question 'Given the present conditions of subjection, what are the possibilities of freedom available to us. This question presupposes that under any given social order the problem of freedom would remain, if only as a logically ever-present question of a freedom from this very order. This discourse of knowledge of freedom is thus reoriented from creating a freedom-friendly order to inquiring into the possibilities of practicing freedom in orders that are, in their own distinct ways, all encroaching on it. As we shall argue below with regard to the insistent demands of Foucault's critics for him to articulate normative criteria in terms of which the 'liberal-democratic freedom' of late-modern Western societies is to be round wanting, what these demands, obfuscate is the irreducible heterogeneity between the form of order and the concrete experience of freedom and knowledge, which can never be subsumed under any set of non-native criteria.

Foucault's work illustrates the difference between post-structuralism and structuralism. Foucault's approach shows multiple theoretical inputs, whereas structuralism was largely influenced by linguistics. The diversity in Foucault's work makes it provocative and difficult. The ideas of Foucault are not adopted by any other thinkers, instead they are transformed as they are integrated into Foucault's unusual theoretical orientation. Thus, there are some impacts of Weber's theory of rationalization. However, to Foucault it is found only in certain 'key sites', and it is not an 'iron cage'; there is always resistance. Marxian ideas are also found in Foucault's work, however, he does not restrict himself to the economy; he also aims on a range of institutions. Foucault was interested in the 'micro-politics of power', rather than in the traditional Marxian concern with power at societal level. Furthermore, Foucault did not believe in ultimate truth; he always believed that there are even more layers that need to be peeled off. Most importantly, Foucault adopts Nietzsche's interest in the relationship between power and knowledge, but Foucault analysed it much more in sociologically way. There are two ideas that are at the core of Foucault's methodology, 'genealogy of power' and 'archaeology of knowledge'.

Alan Sheridan argues that Foucault's archaeology of knowledge involves a search for 'a set of rules that determines the conditions of possibility for all that can

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be said within the particular discourse at any given time'. The concern for 'telling the truth' relates directly to Foucault's genealogy of power. Genealogy is 'a way of linking historical contents into organized and ordered trajectories that are neither the simple unfolding of their origins nor the necessary realization of their ends. It is a way of analysing multiple, open-ended heterogeneous trajectories of discourses, practices and events, and of establishing their patterned relationships, without recourse to regimes of truth that claim pseudo naturalistic laws or global necessities'.

Thus, genealogy is considered to be a 'history of the present'. Though, it should not be confused with 'presentism'. 'Presentism involves the historian's own experiences or context onto aspects of the past under study.' In his methodology of genealogy of power, Foucault is concerned with how people govern themselves and others through the production of knowledge. Foucault sees history moving from one system of domination to another. Foucault believes that knowledge and power is always contested; there is always ongoing resistance to it.

Check Your Progress

1. Where did the school of structuralism develop?
2. How did poststructuralists view meaning in language?
3. Why did Michel Foucault discuss the concept of French epistemology?

14.3 POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is a term which involves many approaches at the same time. Its only common feature is that it reacts to modernism. It rejects any possibility of:

- (i) Single theory,
- (ii) Meta-narratives,
- (iii) Grand Theory,
- (iv) Objectivity and Universality, and
- (v) Telos (purposiveness).

In simple words, postmodernity is a convenient term used for the intellectual era which comes after modernity (in the historical sense). Postmodern social theory refers to 'ideating' by a method which is distinct from modern social theory. It covers:

- (i) New social theories,
- (ii) New cultural products, and
- (iii) A new epoch.

This approach outrightly rejects the earlier notion of foundationalism (prevalent in the early sociological theories) and considers itself nihilistic, relativistic

and non-relational. Postmodern thinkers reject the notion of a grand-narrative. For example, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard criticizes the phenomena of 'grand synthesis' found in modern sociological theories. Such a grand synthesis was found rampantly in Parson and Marx. It can, therefore, be said that any theory in its completeness is to be rejected.

Thinkers like Frederick Jameson (1934-) attempt to provide a portrayal of postmodernity as a 'middle position'. According to him, the capitalist phase is its last stage. This signifies the provision for both progress and chaos together. Jameson emphasized that there are three stages of capitalism:

- (i) Market capitalism: controlled by national demands,
- (ii) Global capitalism: controlled by Imperialists' demands, and
- (iii) Late capitalism: led by shared capital and commodities.

Such a post-capital stage would create a suitable and fertile ground for the inevitable changes in society and culture. The outcome is:

- (a) Association of realistic culture with Market demands,
- (b) Association of modern culture with Monopoly, and
- (c) Association of postmodern culture with multinational demand.

(Fredrick Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1984, New Left, Regal)

According to Jameson, such a postmodern late-capitalist society will manifest three specific traits. In such a society:

- (a) Cultural products are kept for superficiality,
- (b) Alienation is substituted by fragmentation, and
- (c) Historicity is substituted by inter-textuality.

In this way, Jameson's schematic analysis attempts to build a bridge between the Marxian approach and the postmodern theory. How successful it was is a contentious issue.

Conclusion

The question still remains what has been achieved by the emergence of Post-structuralism, post-Marxism and late capitalism. The response would be that all of these perspectives have attempted to demystify the ideological and epistemological 'grand-constructs'. They also provided a new approach to sociological thinkers to study the role of culture with sensitivity and empathetic approach for the subject. It has been said several times that the schools are against the theory. However, this is a paradoxical criticism as most of the postmodernist theories hold a specific theoretical position. As a conclusion, it can be said that sociology (as a discipline) can arrive at better understanding of various issues (if not the fixed and final conclusion) by following the postmodernist method, position and approach.

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Check Your Progress

4. What is postmodern social theory?
5. What are the three stages of capitalism according to Frederick Jameson?

14.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In the early 1960s, the school of structuralism developed on the European Continent, especially in France.
2. The poststructuralists emphasized that the meaning in language is open to diverse interpretations. In fact, different meanings can be assigned to a single text depending upon the context and the background.
3. Foucault first time discussed the concept of French epistemology in order to define the correct meaning of knowledge.
4. Postmodern social theory refers to 'ideating' by a method which is distinct from modern social theory. It covers:
 - (i) New social theories,
 - (ii) New cultural products, and
 - (iii) A new epoch.
5. Jameson emphasized that there are three stages of capitalism:
 - (i) Market capitalism: controlled by national demands,
 - (ii) Global capitalism: controlled by Imperialists' demands, and
 - (iii) Late capitalism: led by shared capital and commodities.

14.5 SUMMARY

- The different schools of Post-Marxism (sometimes referred to as Neo-Marxism) started with a group of thinkers who expressed a desire to examine Marxist orthodoxy using methods of critical enquiry and employing tools of analytical philosophy and 'bourgeoisie social science' together.
- Since this movement started, the environment (in which they have directed their enquiries) has changed in several substantial ways. Here, we should see Late-Marxism as cherishing the egalitarian and democratic values of Marx, though at the same time, willing to abandon (wherever necessary) the Marxian interpretation of capitalism, his method of dialectic materialism and his prescriptions for the future.
- In 1980, there was a huge excitement in intellectual world about the emergence of new schools of ideas and their concepts such as

postmodernism, post-structuralism and deconstruction. All of these theories seem to offer a completely newer perspective for observing and then interpreting the world.

- All these new schools seem to react against the conventional Western ideas and theories prevalent for the last hundreds of years. In order to be updated about recent developments in the field of sociology, it is expected that the fundamental understanding of these schools and their prominent thinkers should also be understood.
- In the early 1960s, the school of structuralism developed on the European Continent, especially in France. The first and the foremost thinker of Structuralism was Claude Levi-Strauss whose new ideas are established on the proposed theories of John Paul Sartre.
- The school of the structuralism starts with the basic premise that ‘if any phenomena has to be understood, then it has to be done only and only through the metaphor of language.’ Therefore, language is to be understood as a complete system (or structure), which is defined only in terms of itself. It is, therefore, a ‘self-referential system’.
- The second thinker of this school was Roland Barthes, who followed the tradition of Strauss by completely refuting the conventional idea that there is a hidden reality in the text which is known only to the author and reading the entire text is nothing but the reader’s attempt to unveil the hidden. He wrote about the ‘Death of the Author’ and proposed that a view of a text is available to all.
- Michel Foucault proposed that even science is to be understood in social context before considering it in intellectual context. It was in this context that it emphasized that ‘Madness’ comes to scientific discoveries later. But primarily ‘it is a social invention’. It was he who, for the first time, claimed that the analysis of the system expects analysis of the interaction between different parts of the system. The ‘core issues’ cannot be understood properly while ignoring the ‘marginal issues’.
- In this way, it can be established that one feature common to all the structuralist thinkers is their revolt against ‘foundationalism’ - questioning any belief or presumption considered to be so basic (foundational) that an entire set of theories, beliefs and opinions can be constructed on it.
- As it is evident from the term post-structuralism itself, it refers to the approach which emerged after and as a response to structuralism. It is an attempt to get insight about the society and culture by critiquing and deconstructing social and cultural phenomena. It can be considered as a departure from the Structuralism.
- For post-structuralists, societal processes and cultural relations are not seen as opposition/ binaries, but such bits-and-pieces which comprise the nature

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of reality. It is because of this argument that the poststructuralists reject any possibility of 'grand narrative' and 'meta-theories'. This approach rejects the earlier structuralists' position/viewpoint that a thinkers' task is to comprehend the reality only through language. For them (poststructuralists), reality constructs itself within the social-metrics and keeps on reproducing itself time-and-again.

- It was on the basis of above-mentioned discussion that the post-structuralism come to the conclusion that the subject can only express and detail what he/she has experienced. It is to be noted here that this includes such experiences for which no language is structured up to now. That is why, they prefer different aspects of language like metaphors, irony and metonymy.
- Post-structuralism begins with Derrida's response to the Structuralists' approach better known as 'deconstruction' of language, society and culture.
- While the Structuralists opined that it is the structure which controls the man, Derrida is of the opinion that all structures can be seen as writings which are incompetent of controlling the subject, while structuralist find staticity in language (therefore in structure).
- Derrida finds language as continuously going through changes. Obviously, a structure formed out of language will itself be unstable and if such is the case, then how can it control the subject? In this way, deconstruction is considered as the critic, rejection and conceptual dissection of structuralism.
- Foucault vehemently rejected the post-structuralist and post-modernist theory. His theory of knowledge was basically influenced by the writings of Nietzsche, the genealogy of knowledge. He stubbornly estranged from the concept of existentialist thinking. *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Prison* and *The History of Sexuality* were the major outstanding contributions of Foucault's thought.
- Postmodernism is a term which involves many approaches at the same time. Its only common feature is that it reacts to modernism. In simple words, postmodernity is a convenient term used for the intellectual era which comes after modernity (in the historical sense).
- Thinkers like Frederick Jameson attempt to provide a portrayal of postmodernity as a 'middle position'. According to him, the capitalist phase is its last stage. This signifies the provision for both progress and chaos together.
- According to Jameson, such a postmodern late-capitalist society will manifest three specific traits: Cultural products are kept for superficiality, Alienation is substituted by fragmentation, and Historicity is substituted by intertextuality.

- Jameson's schematic analysis attempts to build a bridge between the Marxian approach and the postmodern theory. How successful it was is a contentious issue.
- It can be said that sociology (as a discipline) can arrive at better understanding of various issues (if not the fixed and final conclusion) by following the postmodernist method, position and approach.

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14.6 KEY WORDS

- **Grand Narratives:** *It* is a term introduced by Jean-François Lyotard in his classic 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in which Lyotard summed up a range of views which were being developed at the time, as a critique of the institutional and ideological forms of knowledge.
- **Totalitarianism:** It is a system of ideology/government that is centralized and dictatorial and requires complete subservience to the state.
- **Social Structures:** In sociology, the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together. Social structure is often treated together with the concept of *social* change, which deals with the forces that change the social structure and the organization of society.
- **Deconstruction:** It is a method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language which emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression.

14.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the ideas of Michel Foucault.
2. What do you understand by the method of deconstruction in Derrida's thoughts?
3. What are the modernist traits which are rejected by postmodernism?
4. Write short notes on following thinkers:
 - (a) Claude Levi-Strauss
 - (b) Roland Barthes
 - (c) Jacques Derrida
 - (d) Fredrick Jameson

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Long Answer Questions

1. What were the socio-political conditions responsible for the origin of new schools of thoughts? Discuss.
2. Do you think the critique of modernity as given by postmodern approaches is well-justified? Give arguments in favour of your position
3. What are the distinct traits of structuralism? What were the main arguments given by post-structuralism against them?

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