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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY-II

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Block 3 Perspectives in Sociology-III	
Unit 7 Feminist Perspective	Charu Sawhney, Sociology Department, DU
Unit 8 Dalit Perspective	Prof. Vivek Kumar, CSSS, JNU, New Delhi
Block 4 Differences and Debates	
Unit 9 Division of Labour: Durkheim and Marx	Adopted & Edited from ESO 13, Unit-20
Unit 10 Religion: Durkheim and Weber	Adopted & Edited from ESO 13, Unit-19
Unit 11 Capitalism: Marx and Weber	Adopted & Edited from ESO 13, Unit-21
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Course Contents

COURSE INTRODUCTION

The course aims to provide a general introduction to sociological thought. The focus is on studying from the original texts to give the students a flavor of how over a period of time thinkers have conceptualised various aspects of society. This paper also provides a foundation for learners in the other papers.

There are four blocks and twelve Units (Chapters) in this course. The first Block titled **"Perspectives in Sociology-I"** introduces mainly four perspectives of sociology— Evolutionary Perspective, Functionalism, Structuralism, and Conflict Perspective. **Block 2** which is titled **"Perspectives in Sociology-II"** considers two other perspectives of sociology, namely, Interpretive Perspective and Symbolic Interactionism. The **third Block "Perspectives in Sociology-III"** discusses Feminist Perspective and Dalit Perspective. The **fourth Block** titled **"Differences and Debates"** deals with the contrasting perspectives to the understanding of society, namely, "Division of Labour: Durkheim and Marx", "Religion: Durkheim and Weber", and "Capitalism: Marx and Weber". The last Unit under this block (**Block 4**) discusses **"Social Change and Transformation"**.

In order to help the learner to comprehend the text, the Units have been arranged thematically under successive blocks. The Units under each Block have also been structured in order to help the learner. Every Unit begins with the "Structure" of the Unit and is followed by "Objectives", "Introduction", main content, Summary ("Let us sum up"), and "References". In order to make it engaging, exercises are inserted as "check your progress" wherever required. This exercise could also be useful as sample questions in examination point of view. The other important components for better comprehension of the Units are "further reading" and "glossary" which are appended at the end of the course.

Block 1
Perspectives in Sociology-I

UNIT 1   EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE*

Structure

1.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Emergence of evolution as a sociological perspective;

- The key thinkers of evolutionary theory in Sociology and Anthropology;

- Critiques of the evolutionary perspective; and

- Impact of evolutionary theory on contemporary popular thinking.

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The roots of sociology as a subject lie in social philosophy of the West beginning from the early Greek philosophers and taking a definite shape as a discipline during the European Enlightenment period. This period is marked by the establishment of Positivism as a perspective and possibility of its application to human societies. Positivism is based largely upon the works of thinkers such as Descartes and Kant, who reflected upon the nature of human existence, especially about the human consciousness. Descartes' theory of the duality of mind and body laid the foundation for the emergence of modern scientific thinking based on 'Positivism' and a reliance on the efficacy of the senses. An object was something that could be located on the axes of time and space and was accessible to at least one of the senses, and if not known in the present, was knowable in the future with proper technology. Thus science was something that relied on sensory perception, on the evidence of demonstrability and the philosophy of not being inevitable or eternal. In other words, with adequate 'evidence' a 'truth' could always be challenged. Thus positivism believed that there did exists truths that could be established by the use of the scientific method, but that the truth was one only as long as it was not challenged. In other words things were not to be taken as *givens* but they needed to be *established* as truths. This process of establishment of truths, or facts as they were called in scientific terminology had to follow of process based on 'objectivity' and rigour. One had to be detached from the object that one was studying in order to be able to study it in the right

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perspective. The mind/body duality or the separation of mind from matter, was the fundamental premise on which scientific objectivity, necessary for the establishment of factual knowledge was based.

This perspective was in opposition to the dictates of the Church or the theological perspective that enjoined one to accept what was given unquestioningly, not to challenge 'given' truths and accept the unknowable, namely the existence of a sacred reality that was beyond knowledge. In other words there was a fundamental disjoint between facts and faith. Sociology is a new discipline as compared to the ancient ones like astronomy, medicine, the physical sciences and mathematics, because for long society was viewed as a divine creation just like the humans. The possibility of objectifying society had not occurred although the nature of society and of humans was reflected upon by philosophers.

1.2 THE BEGINNING OF THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

The concept of social evolution or the possibility that societies change, or can change was triggered by two major events. The first was the colonisation of the non-White world by the Europeans which had begun with merchant capitalism and was well underway in most parts of the world by the seventeenth century. The Europeans had spread across to many corners of the world in search of land and resources to accommodate their growing populations and the need to feed the emerging industries in their own countries. In the process they came across many different kinds of people and ways of life; a question that became prominent was, why were humans different? Why did they have different ways of life? This question had been answered within the racial paradigm by assuming that they were humans at different levels of 'being human' that some were 'more human' than others. But the humanism of the liberal thinkers of the Enlightenment period were reluctant to accept racial inferiority of some humans as against others.

The Enlightenment period was marked by significant changes in perspective about the world. Concepts such as universal humanism (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) and theories such as that of the Psychic Unity of Mankind, sought to bond the human world together. Ironically these values were formed in the back drop of the genocide and violence that accompanied colonial expansion. But the major thinkers were liberal and were supportive of common humanism and thus the question of diversity remained unanswered for them.

The second historical even was that of the two major revolutions that went into the formation of the world as we know it. The American Revolution and the French Revolution, and the consequent major social upheavals they caused, led social thinkers into thinking that perhaps societies were not made as they were but had changed from some past into the present. If social transformation had happened through the revolutions, especially the kind of radical transformation brought about by the French Revolution (1848), then it is possible that societies must have changed in the past. The second question posed against the first one about human diversity, was the one about human social transformation. The key question was about the European Society of the 18th century, the time when these thoughts matured to form theories, about how the Europeans came to be

what they were, and what was their past? Another key question was about the process of transformation, how does it take place and why?

As pointed out by Raymond Aaron (1965:233) the period of 1848 to 1851 was marked by great political upheavals, "the destruction of a constitutional monarchy in favour of a republic and the destruction of the republic in favour of an imperial, authoritarian regime". This was the period when Comte put forward his theory of social evolution as he could see before his eyes the replacement of the theological and military society with the industrial and scientific one. Comte believed in a unified human history of which there was an ideal and final stage; one that was coming up before him. Thus his conceptualisation of social transformation was one of progress and he identified three major stages of this progressive evolution. In the first stage that is ruled by theology or religion, the humans attribute power and control of society to superhuman beings who resemble them, the gods and goddesses of the ancient religions. In the second stage referred by him as metaphysical, when thought becomes more abstract and transcendental, and the forces become abstract like nature. In the third stage thinking becomes more factual and systematic and people begin to explain phenomenon by direct observation and correlations.

These are not inevitable stages and do not occur uniformly across the world. He explained the transition also in terms of classification of the sciences, from abstract to positivist. Positivist thinking is what defined sciences and appear in the simple sciences first like physics, chemistry and mathematics and later in more complex sciences like biology. He defined sociology as the study of society by the use of the positivist method marked by objectivity and rationality. He also believed that the aim of industrial society was the creation of wealth and thus largely supported the capitalist goals of expansion and accumulation of wealth as progressive and beneficial for future generations. However Comte's predictions about industrial society as being free of war was proved disastrously wrong as Western Europe became not only the center for the major wars but also of colonisation. Comte had borrowed the idea of progress from Condorcet, who had preceded him. His idea of progress had also included the emergence of spiritual power as the ultimate source of power; something that the word is yet to see.

Some of the leading proponents of the evolutionary theory that dominated intellectual thinking of the late nineteenth century were Henry Maine, Herbert Spencer, Toennies, Bachoven, Lewis Henry Morgan and Emile Durkheim. Unlike the three stages postulated by Comte, most of them gave a two stage theory marking some major transition in human social organisation and social philosophy. Henry Maine, an eminent jurist gave his theory of transition from status to contract, that according to him also marked the transition from kinship based societies to state or territorial societies. In the kinship based societies, one gains membership through a relationship or status while in a state it is based upon the concept of citizenship that is primarily territorial and legal or contractual in nature.

The German scholar Tonnies noted that societies pass from being Gemeinschaft to Gesselschaft, by which he marked the transition from rural to urban and from simple face to face societies to more complex ones. The Gemeinschaft is characterised by personalised, emotional relationships and Gesselschaft by

impersonal, formal and calculative relationships. In the sense that Tonnies did not think that the impersonalised complex society was better than the emotionally coherent and secure face to face community life of simple societies; one may say that his concept of evolution was not towards becoming better. In this sense he also did not eulogize the emerging industrial urban societies of Europe.

Bachoven, also an eminent European scholar of the nineteenth century, gave a schema of development from matriarchy to patriarchy, similar to that of McLennan. This categorisation was Eurocentric and had a bias against the Eastern and indigenous societies where matriliny was located. Bachoven's illustration of matriarchy was not drawn from any actual societies (of which there are no known ethnographic examples) but from his own imagined societies. His characterisation of the Mother-Right Complex indicated that it comprised of mostly negative and passive traits and that Father Right was progressive and marked the advent of civilization. He also associated the latter with the western hemisphere and considered the conquest of the East by the West as the beginning of civilization.

Emile Durkheim's sociological construct was based on more structural than moral or civilisational considerations. He considered that simpler or lower stage societies were based on mechanical solidarity, while more complex societies were based on organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity was based on bonding of likeness that occurred in societies where everyone was like everyone else. People related to each other like a moral community, like one based on descent from a common totemic ancestor, and these communities were bound by ties of cooperation and sharing. As society grew more complex, there occurred specialisations of skills, crafts and resources. Instead of co-operation, such a society became organised around exchange, as people were having different resources that they needed to exchange with each other. The more complex became the division of labour, the more complex became the social organisation and stratification occurred to accommodate differentiation of skills and control over resources. While the mechanical solidarity had a moral basis, the organic solidarity was rational and instrumental.

Among the classical sociological theories of evolution, the most elaborate and complete was given by Herbert Spencer. He gave a stage by stage evolution of political society, beginning from one with no state or no chief , then one that was a chiefdom, then a compounded society of chiefs (like ancient feudal societies), then the emergence of the state and then the modern state. The last two are complex entities that encompass multiple political forms and levels and are guided by many levels of power and managerial structures. Spencer has been mostly criticized for his theory that society should let the powerless and weak get eliminated. He was against any kind of social support mechanisms for the weak, saying that only those who had the ability to achieve had the right for survival. His idea of progress was thus based on a self-development and ability to endure in competitive situations, implying that ultimately only those who deserved to survive or were, "fit" should continue. Social welfare was a process that he did not approve of as he thought that it would make possible the survival of those that did not deserve to survive. Quite rightly his theory has been criticized by those who believe in human rights, social justice and humanity. But at the same time such theories did influence more conservative thinkers who held racially and class informed prejudices.

1.3   THE ORGANIC ANALOGY AND BIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF EVOLUTION

The positivist approach to the study of society also led to what has been known as an organic analogy for society, comparing society to a biological organism that follows natural laws. One aspect of the organic analogy was that society as an organism was compared to an embryo, as the embryo grows by its own law of development, the society will also evolve by its own law. This premise was also the basis of the unilineal theory of social evolution, so that society was comparable to a species that evolves in a single line. The organic analogy also assumed that the present society were a derivative of the earlier ones and in the process of evolution, they diversified and branched out; the tree analogy.

The second aspect of the biological analogy was the natural selection paradigm. In social evolution, the mistaken assumption of "survival of the fittest" was adapted by Herbert Spencer and those who followed his theory. In biological evolution the term used was "descent with modification", and the term, "fittest" is actually one that means nothing in the context of biological evolution as all that is required for a species to survive is the ability to reproduce itself. As long as it produces enough progeny to continue the species, it is considered as 'fit'. However all species are connected to each other and to the natural environment, so survival is not the function of the ability of a single species to survive but of all others on which it is dependent for its survival, those that provide its food and resource base, as well the natural conditions that make its survival possible. Thus unlike what was assumed by scholars like Spencer, survival is more a relational than an individual matter. Similarly, internal differences and variations exist in biological species as well as societies, so that survival and 'fitness' cannot be generalised over the entire community of both a biological species and a human society.

1.4   THEORIES OF CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Following the lead given by the eighteenth century philosophers like Comte, Montesquieu, Durkheim and others; the discipline of anthropology, founded formally in the early twentieth century by Edward B Tylor at the University of Oxford, also began its theoretical journey with evolutionism, although there was a parallel stream of diffusion theorists as well. Tylor not only gave the first formal definition of culture, he also traced the course of cultural evolution in much the same way as Comte had outlined the evolution of society. To Tylor, Culture with a capital C (Ingold 1986), was a unitary entity that was common to all mankind. The problem was to explain the variation of culture across the globe. By the early twentieth century, because of colonisation, the Western world was aware of a wide variety of societies and cultures across the world. The eighteenth century social philosophers were mainly concerned with the evolution of their own society, but anthropology developed as a study of global cultures and also focused on non-western societies. Tylor gave his theory of Unilineal Evolution where he also postulated three major stages of development of Culture, Savagery, Barbarism and Civilization, each marked, as according to him, by one great leap made by humankind. Thus the transition from Savagery to Barbarism came with the advent of agriculture and from Barbarism to Civilization, with literacy. To him Culture was a product of the human mind and

it evolved according to its own rationality irrespective of the context. In this sense evolutionary theory followed the positivist methodology of being nomothetic and context independent. It also followed the organic analogy to the extent that evolution was a natural process with its inherent potential and law of development.

While he sifted through large amount of data collected from various sources, he constructed several sequences of evolution pertaining to different strands of culture. The most well- known of his sequences is that of religion. Apart from Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan in America was also influenced by the evolutionary theory of his predecessors and gave his parallel theory of social evolution that was also informed by his fieldwork among the Native Americans.

Morgan was of the opinion that original ideas come only once and they subsequently develop according to their inner potential and follow a logical sequence. The main ideas that form society are the ones pertaining to Subsistence, Law, Inheritance, Political Organisation and Family. He divided the history of social evolution into Ethnical Periods, each period marked by a particular level of development of each of the entities identified by him as the foundational structures of society. The Ethnical periods according to him are the same as those identified by Tylor, namely Savagery, Barbarism and Civilization, but he gave a far more elaborate and integrated description of each period that were also internally divided into lower, middle and higher levels. Each level is marked by a particular mode of subsistence and technological development that is matched by developments in the other spheres of life.

Morgan, recognized as the father of kinship studies also gave a more macro level two fold evolutionary schema; from Societas to Civitas; that is from societies based on kinship to those based on territory and state.

1.5 LIMITATION OF CLASSICAL EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

In summary, classical evolutionary theory had as its major premise, the postulate of one human society and one culture. The sociological theories that were foundational, were attempting to understand the past of the European societies of the nineteenth century and the scholars located in the time zone of the French and American Revolutions and other significant political upheavals of those times were trying to understand the process of social transformation and the possibility of regarding societies as objects of study. There was also the assumption that society was like a natural system subject to uniform laws like all natural systems.

The flaw lay in the speculative nature of the stages of evolution that were put forward especially with reference to the logical future stages to which they pointed. According to Comte the industrial society of the future would be rational and peaceful and spirituality of the philosophers and scientists would prevail. Thus the belief that militarism was to be a thing of the past, was completely turned around by the two World Wars and Comte's hope that Western civilization would rise above brute force was completely shattered.

The anthropological theories of cultural and social evolution on the other hand were trying to explain not just western societies but the 'Others'. The stage by

stage scheme of progress that they proposed had the additional demerit, apart from being speculative, of being Eurocentric as well. Thus progress was measured simply by the distance or difference that any society had from early twentieth century Europe that provided the standard for measurement of progress. Thus for example, in his schema for the evolution of religion, Tylor had put monotheism at the apex, implying that the Judeo-Christian religions were superior to the polytheistic or nature worshipping ones. A major flaw in all the schema was that they compounded technological progress or complexity with moral, social and cultural evolution. Thus the Australian Aborigines were deemed most 'primitive' just because they looked the most different from the Europeans and also because they had stone tools.

Later scholars used ethnographic and field data to contest most of these speculations. It was realized that each culture was to be understood only contextually and that technology was not to be confused with values and moral systems. Knowledge existed in many forms and most importantly all people were rational in their own context. Paul Radin, in his excellent work on cross-cultural beliefs, showed that every culture has its share of all kinds of people, the believers, the philosophers, the agnostics, the sceptics and non-believers. There were everywhere people driven by custom, people who just conformed to given norms and those that were seekers and creators. Malinowski showed how Primitive Magic, considered as superstition, was actually a functional system that assisted rational goals to be reached. There was also criticism of the idea that the non-western people were incapable of higher and esoteric thinking. In his study of Nuer Religion for example Evans-Pritchard has described their complex philosophy, capacity for esoteric thought and complex system of symbols. The 'primitive' Australian Aborigines had a complex system of marriage exchange that required expert mathematical abilities to decipher. Even the technological expertise of the so-called 'primitives' was exceptional. There were many instances of technological expertise that even the best of western people found difficult to duplicate and understand, like the boomerang and complex traps used by them.

There were many critiques of the concept of 'good life' and of 'progress' pointing to the obviously Eurocentric and capitalist nature of these postulates.

1.6 NEO-EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES

By the forties to the sixties, however there was a rethinking of the concept of evolution, especially after the World Wars. Some scholars felt that evolution in the form of a general line of development of societies was real and with the criticism of Structural-Functional theory as being too static and a historical the interest in change was revived in the context of the rapid transformations of the Post-World War world.

The major neo-evolutionary theories for culture were put forward by Julian Steward, Leslie White and Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service. The common methodological premise of all the three theories was that they all tried to make the understanding of evolution as an inductive process rather than a purely deductive one, as was the methodology of the classical evolutionists who proceeded on purely logical grounds. They tried to relate evolution of society to its environmental and historical context, bringing in reference to empirically

collected data and factual information. Each of them also had their own interpretation of the concept of culture that they reconstructed and redefined according to their theoretical premises.

Julian Steward (1955) has referred to his theory of culture change, also known as theory of cultural ecology, as both a theory and a method. His view of culture was layered with a core and a periphery. The core of the culture comprised of the techno-economic variables that interacted with certain parts of the environment, depending upon the nature of subsistence activities of that particular society. This core culture has a dialectical relationship with the environment; in that as the techno-economic system interacts with the environment, it transforms the environment, and again to interact with the transformed environment, the techno-economic system is again transformed, and this process, that is gradual and spread over a long period of time, brings about an evolution of the social system.

However since this type of evolution is directly related to the environmental conditions, and the environments vary over the globe, it is not possible that there will be one line of evolution. Thus Steward put forward what he calls his theory of multilinear evolution. He theorized that since there are some typical ecological zones of the world, it is possible that one could trace the common lines of development, if one painstakingly traced the line of evolution from available data in each of these zones. It is to be expected that by and large similar lines of development would take place under similar environmental conditions. But Steward was emphatic that such commonalities need to be demonstrated and not taken for granted. This empiricism was what he called as his method. For each sequence to be reconstructed, the specific technological and economic variables that interact with the environmental variables have to be identified, as well as those aspects of the environment that are interacting with these variables. One then has to trace the sequences through which these variables transform.

Each set of technological and economic factors form a type of adaptive mode; and there are only a selected such modes that exist in the world. Thus according to Steward, on can identify the core variables that constitute the major adaptive systems. His theory became the basis of classification of these systems. But his theory of Multilinear evolution, although logical and probable, became difficult to reconstruct largely because of the difficulties of actually determining sequences.

Leslie White (1943) was a follower of Edward B Tylor's theory of Unilineal Evolution. He too believed in most of the theory given by Tylor and he thought that the criticism levelled at Tylor was out of a misunderstanding of the processes of history and evolution. According to him, evolution is nomothetic and context independent and has its own generalised laws; while history is context specific and ideographic. He also believed that evolution is progressive because humans are always seeking how to better their lives.

According to him, Tylor was right in identifying agriculture as the first step towards civilization but the growth of civilization cannot be located in writing but in the next step in the utilisation of energy, that is the invention of the steam engine. To him the evolution of human civilization is brought about not by any

abstract factors but the concrete and material one of utilisation of energy. As human technology is able to harness more and more energy, it grows and progresses. Larger amounts of energy can also be harnessed by a growth of population, so that even where technology is not progressed a civilization can grow by having more people to work. He had put forward a simple equation for measuring evolution, namely $E \times T = C$, that is Energy $\times$ Technology= Culture.

His main critic was Marshall Sahlins, according to whom to equate human progress with growth of technology was a fallacy as technology is a tool that has both positive and negative potentials. Wars, colonisation and destruction too were a mark of Western civilization's control over technology. Again material progress could not be equated with better quality of life in terms of happiness and leisure (Sahlins 1972).

Sahlins and Service (1960) proposed a dual scheme of evolution based on the accepted premise that human society has evolved from simple to more complex states marked by increased population density and more complex organisational structures without assuming that any of these transformations are accompanied by any value judgments such as progress or betterment of human life. Sahlins also redefined the notion of culture to say that we can have a generalised and overall view of culture as the larger culture of humankind that has transformed through major stages of development such as agriculture, urbanisation, industrialisation, literacy and technology. But cultures in the plural refer to those specific adaptations to local environments that mark out the functional aspects of individual cultures and their identity and boundaries.

Sahlins and Serviceuses the imagery of a tree to describe what he calls as General and Specific Evolution. The main trunk of the tree is analogous to General Evolution, it grows outwards and upwards and takes only one direction, while Specific Evolution refers to the specific adaptations of individual cultures to their environment. For example the advent of agriculture as a global event is part of General Evolution, but the adaptation of the Eskimo to their local environment is an example of Specific evolution. While specific evolution is linked to adaptation or the ability of a culture to survive and continue, general evolution is linked to the process of adaptability. Adaptability refers to the ability of a culture to expand to adapt beyond its boundaries to situations other than its own. In the nineteenth century the Western Europeans developed the ability of adaptability, to spread across the globe, through their mastery over seafaring and their use of gun- powder. Such adaptability on the part of one culture may lead to threat to the survival of other cultures and may not be seen s 'progressive'. Adaptability also leads to another process called 'Adaptive Radiation'; the most outstanding example of which is the colonisation by the west over large parts of the globe and the extraordinary spurt in European population in the seventeenth century when a large part of the world turned white from being black or brown. Today our stereotype of an American is that of a white person, but just a few centuries back, this was not the case, there was not even a single white person on that part of the world.

Adaptive radiation by any species or community leads to the extinction of others and is not a favourable process that is beneficial or progressive except for those who are able to master it. Those who manage to spread and establish their dominance then also declare their culture or way of life as superior and in the

process of colonisation not only is there a takeover of land but also the elimination and marginalisation of cultures, ways of life and systems of knowledge.

Parsons and Lenski

These two sociologists came much later in the late twentieth century (Parsons 1966, Lenski 1966) but gave their versions of social evolution that paralleled those of the classical evolutionists. Being a sociologist rather than an anthropologist, Parsons looked at the evolution of western society alone. He gave a stage by stage evolutionary theory similar to that of Spencer, but he was more interested in the nature of the societies than in their exact temporal sequence. He added a stage of Archaic societies, represented by ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia to Spencer's stage of Historic Intermediate Empires comprising of China, India, Rome and the Islamic world. Since evolution is meant to depict a stage of development and not an actual historical time scale, it does not make much sense as the nature of the two societies designated as Archaic is similar to the societies designated as Historic Intermediary (Collins 1997:17). Apart from the sequential stage, Parsons also introduced what he calls as 'Seed-bed' Societies that had shown exceptional creative power, namely ancient Israel and Greece. Although these societies were not developed as much as their contemporaries in terms of size and political centralisation, they sowed the seeds of philosophy, science and religion that led to the development of modern civilization.

Lenski's stages are based on subsistence patterns and follow a materialistic line of development rather than making any reference moral and cultural developments. He refers primarily to technologies and draws out stages similar to Morgan's sequence of the ideas of subsistence, and similar also to the modes of adaptation identified by Julian Steward. Lenski also gave to technologies a somewhat deterministic role by saying that technology affects the rest of society so that the level of technology will determine the level of development of the other parts of society. Thus as also proposed by Steward and as demonstrated by ethnography, hunting food gathering societies have small populations, no centralised political system and very little of social inequality and those with horticulture have different patterns of inheritance, property and political organisations and so on. His model also does not discount that one mode of subsistence may not co-exist with another, like hunting with fishing and horticulture with pastoral activities. However these classification by modes of subsistence is common in anthropology but it is not necessary that they actually form any historical sequence in that one stage is necessarily followed by another or that people may not stay on in one stage forever. However Lenski had given his sequence only to say that the next step in technology is not possible unless the first sage occurs, like settled agriculture will only follow incipient agriculture. However since his theory is very similar to that of Julian Steward's designation of the various techno-economic systems that possible exist in the world; the criticism would be that it would be better to view them only as a typology and not as a sequence.

Check Your Progress

1)   What historical circumstances led to the formulation of the early French thoughts about evolution of human society?

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2) What were the stages put forward by August Comte? In what way they did not stand up to history?

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3) What are the main criticisms of classical evolutionary theory?

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4) Who were some of the well- known proponents of the theories of cultural evolution? How were their theories both similar and different from each other?

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5) Was 'Progress' a concept common to all theories of evolution? Discuss those who did not think that all transformations were progressive even though they led to complexity.

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6) What do you understand by Multilinear Evolution? How does it differ from Unilinear Evolution?

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7) Discuss the contribution of Parsons to the theory of social evolution.

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8) Is there a link between technological progress and moral evolution? Critically examine with reference to theory.

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9) Describe the concepts of General and Specific Evolution. Who gave this theory?

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10) How is evolutionist theory still reflected in social and political life? Critically discuss.

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1.7   LET US SUM UP

We have seen that evolutionism was the first consequence of an objective of positivist view of society, yet in its formulation and application, it failed to conform to the objectivity and rationality expected out of the purely scientific methodology. In determining the stages of the sequence of development, one can see the obvious Eurocentric bias. Wherever the author has mentioned progress, it has been the model of then contemporary Western society that has been held up as the peak of civilization. To some extent, nineteenth century evolutionism was also taken as supportive of colonisation as according to the theories of Spencer, Tylor, Morgan and others justified that western cultures dominate over other, 'less developed', ' primitive' cultures to help them jump to

civilization. In many ways contemporary populations were designated as 'Primitive' only because of the evolutionary theory's postulate of remnants from the past surviving into the present (Kuper 1958) thereby justifying colonisation. Rather than destructive, western cultures were actually seen as constructive and beneficial, even as they destroyed lives and peoples (Hobart 1993). It is only recently that the government of India has changed the designation, Primitive Tribal Groups to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, but the term 'primitive' is still freely used in the corridors of power, especially while making polices that favour large corporations and mega projects of dams and mining.

The influence of classical evolutionism persists in the Eurocentric models of development pursued by most of the world including those colonised earlier. In the contemporary world most states are still pursuing blindly the materialistic, profit driven model of modernity that was proposed by nineteenth century Europe and which has taken its most regressive form in the shape of the USA. It is now the American more than the European model that dominates world economy and society and which again puts forward a highly biased model of development based on market driven capitalism. Evolutionism like racism has become a part of the public collective mind and more importantly of the power holders who make the policy decisions. Development is still seen as progressive and a one way street where the end product is highly motivated by an America inspired model of capitalist expansion. Backward is another word for 'primitive'.

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UNIT 2   FUNCTIONALISM*

Structure

2.0   OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to know:

- The concept of functionalism;

- The contributions of various functionalists;

- The causal factors of social change;

- The rate of social change;

- The impact of social change on human society; and

- Social change and the future.

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Functionalism refers to the perspective the way the theories in sociology and social anthropology have explained social institutions or other social phenomena primarily in terms of the functions they perform. When we speak of some social institutions, social activity or social phenomenon, we mean its consequences for the operation of some other institution, activity or society as a whole, such as, consequences of the punishment of a crime or a reward for an extra ordinary discovery by some scientists. Some social thinkers in nineteenth century theorised about society in terms of an 'organic analogy`. This notion of analogy was derived from biology, as there is a biological organism likewise. We can consider a society as on organism, which is a complex whole of several inseparable and inter-dependent organs. It has its roots in the organicism of early 19th century. One of the beginners of this idea of 'organic analogy` was Herbert Spencer. Other important proponents who clearly theorised functions of social institutions was French sociologist Emile Durkheim.

The idea of studying social life in terms of social functions was central among early twentieth century British social Anthropologists, prominent among them

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are B. Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. Adjoining with social structure, the idea of structural-functionalism or structural functional perspective dominated the scene of sociology in various parts of the world. In American sociology, in the light of the contemporary social processes, some evaluation was undertaken by two prominent sociologists namely Talcott Parsons and R.K. Merton. Contributions of these two American sociologists are also considered path breaking in the functional perspective in addition to others which have not been so importantly acknowledged. Neo-functionalism is a later and recent consideration to the theorising of society, retaining some of the basic ideas of the founders of this perspective. It finds the limitations of existing notion of functionalism and improves upon the earlier basic considerations of functionalism.

2.1   FOUNDERS OF FUNCTIONALISM

2.1.1   Herbert Spencer

Hebert Spencer (1820=1903) is a British Sociologist who is generally considered by some historians of sociology as a continuator of Auguste Comte's organist and evolutionary approach. But his general orientation differs significantly from that of Comte. He himself claims that "Comte tried to give a coherent account of the 'progress of human conceptions' whereas my aim is to give a coherent account of the progress of the external world …to describe the necessary and the actual, filiation of things … to interpret the genesis of phenomena which constituted of nature " (Coser 1996). Both organic and social aggregates are characterised by Spencer according to progressive increase in size. Social aggregates, like organic ones, grow from relatively undifferentiated states in which parts resemble one another into differentiated states... once parts become unlike, they become mutually dependent on each other (ibid). Thus, with growing differentiation comes growing interdependence and hence integration. Largely sociologists have considered Herbert Spencer as an evolutionary sociologist but his basic consideration of parts with growing differentiation becoming interdependent and this working for or resulting into integration indicate the genesis of the elements of "structural-functional" theorising of society as an organism, a living whole. On the basis of such writings it is said that the notion of social function had been formulated in the nineteenth century most explicitly by Hebert Spencer. This analysis of social structure and social function has been provided by him in his famous book, *Principles of Sociology*. This contains the very first idea of theorising social function in sociology (Bottomore 1975). Later it has been taken up systematically, rigorously and clearly by other sociologists and social anthropologists in late nineteenth century and early-mid twentieth century. The main ideas of Herbert Spencer on functionalism may be summarized as follows:

1)   Society is a system (an organic whole or organism). It is a coherent whole of connected and interdependent parts.

2)   This system can only be understood in terms of the operation of specific structures each of which has a function for maintaining the social whole.

3)   The systems have needs that must be satisfied if the systems have to survive (i.e. continuity of society). Therefore the function of a structure must be determined by understanding the needs it satisfies.

Though Herbert Spencer is given the credit for formulating explicitly the tenets of functionalism in sociology at first, he has remained controversial about his ideas regarding functional needs etc. of the social system to which he considered a social organism similar to a biological organism and also analyses its evolution. Thereby he is not considered a functionalist per se but an evolutionist. Of his many publications during his lifetime, the most significant books well known among sociologists are "*The Study of Sociology*" and "*Principles of Sociology*" (published during 1870-1880s). He enjoyed the esteem of radical thinkers like John Stuart Mill, Huxley and others.

2.1.2   Emile Durkheim

David Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) is a French Sociologist who is generally regarded as the founder of French sociology as well as Sociology as a distinct discipline. He developed a rigorous methodology combining empirical research with Sociological Theory. His work focused on how traditional and modern societies evolved and function. From his many writings four books are endorsed as most valuable among sociologists around the world, namely, *The Division of Labour in Society*, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, *Le Suicide*, and *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Emile Durkheim, clearly outlined the subject of Sociology and its methodology. He borrowed some ideas selectively from the contributions of Herbert Spencer. He clearly advanced the concept of (social) functions and established functionalism into a coherent, clear and justified doctrine. He established the clear-cut concept of functions in his famous work, "The Division of Labor in Society" wherein he studied the functions of division of labor in society (or for the society as a whole).

Before we briefly describe these functions, let us first look at how he defines functions. In his book 'Division of Labor in Society', he takes up at first the clear cut formulation of the concept of function. According to him 'function of social institution is the correspondence between it (the institution) and the need of the social organism' (this analogy of social organism is derived from Spencer). That means a social institution satisfies a need of society. What then is the vital need of society? He takes up this issue in this study. The crucial or vital need of society, according to him, is the maintenance of solidarity in society (in other words, integration of society). In studying division of labor, as a social institution, he asks the question, 'What is the function of division of labor in Society'? He addresses this issue in terms of the vital need of the society. For Durkheim, social solidarity is the vital need of society. The division of labor in Industrial Society (as was Western Europe, during the latter half of the nineteenth century) provides the basis of this social solidarity. These are rapidly differentiating societies in comparison to the simpler societies. Durkheim considers solidarity as the vital need as without maintaining solidarity in society the society may break up and might not remain a society per se.

In his later work (last book), "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life", he undertakes the task of studying the causes and functions of religion. Durkheim argues that religion is one of the great sources for regulating the society, thus fulfilling the function of maintaining solidarity. Religion unites people into a common system of ideas (collective consciousness) which then regulates the affairs of the collective. He is of the view that if the vital need, of maintaining solidarity in society, is not met, then, pathological (abnormal) forms like 'anomie' are likely to occur. It is this perspective which distinguishes sociology from

other social sciences. He is considered the founding father of functional perspective or theory in sociology. But some social thinkers consider that his functionalism has been rooted in the evolutionary theory, and there is no doubt that it appears to be true to some extent. But establishing sociology as a distinct discipline with its subject matter and method, the credit would go to him. Likewise, establishing theorising society by functional perspective remains also his accomplishment.

2.1.3 Bronislaw Malinowski

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) is a British Social Anthropologist who is well known for his theory of functionalism. He was said to have been greatly influenced academically by Emile Durkheim, C.G. Seligman and E. Westermarck. He influenced many social anthropologists, and under his influence they devoted themselves to the detailed and meticulous description of actual behavior in particular societies. His functional approach emphasized on the field work involving exact observation and recording of social behavior. He studied the Trobriand Islanders following his approach by mainly using 'participant observation' method. His book, '*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*' is the outcome of his field work on the Trobriand Islanders. The publication of this classical book earned him as a world known Anthropologist. It was from this detailed and meticulous description of culture of Trobrianders that he came out strongly against the Evolutionary Theory and the Comparative Method of the earlier sociologists and anthropologists and his unique functionalism. He made the conceptual formulation of functional approach in a later writing, '*A Scientific Theory of Culture*'. He argued that 'every' cultural item contributes to the maintenance of the culture-whole; it thus satisfies some need of this whole. He further asserts that 'every cultural item fulfills some vital function'. Malinowski used the concept of function suggesting that society (for him culture) could be conceptualised as it is made up of interdependent parts (his term-cultural items) that operate together to meet different social needs. Malinowski's functionalism added two new ideas: (i) a notion of system levels, and (ii) concept of different and multiple systems needs at each level. According to him, there are three system levels: *the biological*, *the social structural* and *the symbolic*.

Malinowski emphasises on the study of culture as a whole (or the totality) with its functions and patterns. He examined, explained and analysed as to why and how culture functions, how different elements of culture are related into an entire cultural pattern. For him, functionalism attempts to explain the parts institutions play within the integrated whole of culture. Institutions operate to satisfy the needs of the individuals and that of the society as a whole. Malinowski considers that every aspect (element) of culture has a function and they are all interdependent and interrelated. Therefore, a functional unity can be observed among them in maintaining the existence of human beings.

Malinowski's basic argument is based on the premise that every aspect of culture has a function, i.e. satisfaction of a need. He identifies three levels of needs: (i) *Primary* (ii) *Institutional* and (iii) *Integrative*. Primary needs are largely biological needs such as sex, food and shelter. Institutional needs are the institutions (economic, legal, etc.) which help in satisfying primary needs. Integrative needs refer to those needs that help the society maintain coherence such as religion. Some sociologists consider that Malinowski's functionalism was individualistic-

functionalism as it focused on fundamental biological needs of the individuals. Some others would also consider his functional approach as 'pure functionalism'. It is also said that his functional approach involved a strong assertion of the functional integration of every society.

2.1.4 A.R. Radcliffe-Brown

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) is a British Social Anthropologist whose theories of functionalism (structural-functionalism) somewhat differs from that of Malinowski. He is said to have been greatly influenced by the functionalism of Emile Durkheim. He clarifies how some of the problems of organic analogizing might be overcome in functionalism. He recognizes that "the concept of function is based on an analogy between social life and organic life". He considers that the serious problem with functionalism was the tendency for analysis to appear teleological. Taking into account Durkheim's definition of function 'the way in which a part (a social institution) fulfills a system's needs', Radcliffe-Brown emphasized that it would be necessary to substitute for the term 'needs', by 'necessary conditions of existence'. It was his effort to avoid teleological implications of functionalism. Thus, he replaces the term 'needs' given by Durkheim by 'necessary conditions of existence'. For him the question is which conditions are necessary for survival and that issue would be an empirical one. It would have to be discovered for each given social system. He considers that there is a diversity of conditions necessary for the survival of different systems. He avoids the assertion that every item of culture (as considered by Malinowski) must have a function and that items in different cultures must have the same function.

Radcliffe-Brown views that it is not a singular functional analysis but structural functional analysis which has several important assumptions — (1) One necessary condition for survival of a society is that it has minimal integration of its parts, (2) the term function refers to those processes that maintain this necessary integration or solidarity; (3) Thus, in each society structural features can be shown to contribute to the maintenance of the necessary solidarity. In this approach, according to Radcliffe-Brown, the social structure and the conditions necessary for its survival are irreducible.

In this whole analysis and understanding, like Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown saw society as a reality in and of itself. For this reason he used to visualize cultural items, such as kinship rules and religious rituals, as explicable in terms of social structure, particularly its need for solidarity and integration. Radcliffe-Brown assumes some minimal degree of solidarity that must exist in the system. He studied lineage systems in terms of their consequences for maintaining this solidarity. In his study '*The Andaman Islanders*', he analyses the function of weeping and dancing ceremonies. These ceremonies, which are repetitive, adjudicate conflicts, and thus re-establish the solidarity of the system (of the community, which fell apart for the time being due to tiny conflicts).

Radcliffe-Brown considers that 'functional unity (integration or solidarity) of a social system is of course, a hypothesis'. He finally considers that function is the contribution which a partial activity makes to the total activity (a whole) of which it is a part. All partial activities (parts) contribute to the maintenance of the whole and bring about a kind of unity which is said to be a social unity of the organism. He is known as functionalist but his functionalist view is strictly related

to structure. His specific writings on the concept of function are available in his well-known work '*Structure and Function in Primitive Society*'.

2.2 LATER FUNCTIONALISTS

2.3.1 Talcott Parsons

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) is a prominent American Sociologist who is probably the most dominant theorist of the twentieth century. Parsons' functionalism has attempted to incorporate the suggestiveness of early functional analysis, especially the conception of social system as consisted of interrelated parts. The current forms of functional theorizing have tried to cope with the analytical problems of teleology and tautology, which Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown unsuccessfully tried to avoid. In borrowing the 19th century organicism and exploiting conceptually the unity of viewing system parts as having implications for the operation of the systematic whole, this modern functionalism of Parsons and others provided early sociological theorizing with a unified conceptual perspective.

From the 1950s to 1970s Parsonian functionalism was clearly a focal point around which the critical controversy raged. Even later, Parsonian functionalism remains a subject of intense controversy. In 1937, his major work '*The Structure of Social Action*' was published, and for the next four decades, his ideas dominated. His basic idea was rooted in a sequence of the action of the actors. Following certain norms, values and other ideas (as available in the system) an actor is oriented towards achieving goals (social goals, inclusive of individual goals) by operating in situational conditions. These give rise to action systems. This 'system' of social action or 'social system' is the key word to his functional analysis. The social system is comprised of statuses, roles and norms. According to him, actors are oriented to situations in terms of motives (needs). The motives (or needs) are mainly of three types: (1) Cognitive (need for information or knowledge), (2) Cathetic (need for emotional attachment) and (3) Evaluative (need for assessment). Further, Parsons gives the notion of functional prerequisites. Following Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown's lead, he views integration (within and among action systems) as a basic survival requite (i.e. need of the social system, or in simpler terms, the need of society). He is concerned with the integration within the social system itself and between the social system and the cultural system on the one hand and between the social system and personality system on the other. These three systems, namely, Social System, Cultural System and Personality system are crucial in his analysis. His conceptual scheme reflects the systematic interconnectedness of social systems. Later he returns to the integrative problems of culture and personality.

Another related concept, to his concept of social systems is the concept of institutionalisation. As interactions became institutionalized, a social system can be said to exist. According to him, institutionalisation is the process through which social structure is built up and maintained. Institutional cluster of roles, that is, stabilized patterns of interaction comprise a social system.

For understanding social system he considered its structural elements and functional prerequisites. The structural elements are goals, roles, norms and values. For fulfilling the needs of the social system, every social system has

necessarily functional prerequisites, i.e., to say the institutionalised organs (or sub systems) within the sphere or perimeters of the social system. This he presents in a paradigm known as 'AGIL' paradigm. A stands for adaptation, G stands for goal attainment, I for integration and L for Latency (i.e. pattern maintenance and tension management). Adaptation is a system in society for fulfilling basic needs – food, shelter, etc. According to him, Economy or Economic sub system fulfills these needs. This subsystem is always available in all societies. Goal attainment is a system that concerns with how to determine these goals. He distinguishes individual and collective goals and his emphasis remains largely on collective goals. The polity or Political sub system (as a sub system of social system) fulfills the need of goal attainment within the context. Integration is another vital need of the social system. This is undertaken by institutionalised arrangement like (and most importantly) religion. Thus, in his consideration, religion corresponds to this need of maintaining integration in society. No system can be continued and maintained if there are no controls. If there are deviations or conflicts, then the social system must have the capacity to contain all these. In Parsons` paradigm latency is maintained by institution of law – law courts, police, and administrative system. Thus, legal system (as a subsystem) fulfills the need of latency.

When a given social system is large and comprises of many interrelated institutions, these are typically viewed as subsystems. The above mentioned AGIL is thus, an example of interrelated subsystems. According to Parsons it is necessary to remember that a social system is circumscribed by cultural patterns and infused with personality systems. Thus, Parsons goes much ahead of the formulations of functionalism by Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown. According to Jonathan Turner the development of four functional requisites – A, G, I and L – is not a radical departure from the earlier works. It is true that structures are viewed explicitly in terms of their functional consequences for meeting the four requisites. This leads to the survival capacity of the social system and Parsonian scheme begins to look like an elaborate mapping operation. Of course, much criticism has been inflicted on the Parsonian functionalism but most theoretical desirable alternatives take some threads from his theory, whether reject all or in parts. Thus, his functionalism remains a well-known theoretical formulation of the twentieth century.

2.3.2 R.K. Merton

Robert King Merton (1911-2003) is a well-known American sociologist who attempted to overcome the shortcomings of functionalism advanced by its founders namely Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. He is one of the two great American Sociologists who dominated the scenario of functionalist theory during the middle period of the twentieth century along with Talcott Parsons. He began with the very etymological meanings of 'function' and separated out of those the relevant and contextual meaning of the term being adopted by early sociologists. In this sense function refers to the 'vital or organic process considered in respects in which they contribute to the maintenance of the organism`. This meaning conveys the way in which it has been used in biology. He states that it is this usage, with modifications appropriate to the study of human society (as an organism), that early sociologists Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown have adopted and thus clarified the key concept, 'function'. According to Merton, Radcliffe-Brown has been most explicit in tracing the working

conception of social function to the analogical model found in biological sciences. Durkheim also referred to 'vital organic processes and the need of the organism'. Of course, Radcliffe-Brown moved on to state 'function of any recurrent activity, the part it plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to the maintenance of structural continuity'. But all that was based on analogy between social organism (a society) and parts (activity or institution in society). The allegation was also made against the functionalism of the earlier theorists that functionalism only takes note of maintenance, i.e., stability, and there was no scope of understanding change, and that concept was applied only to the simpler societies.

Merton addressed to these limitations in his reformulation or modification of the concept of function. He clarifies the concept of function as 'those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system'.

Merton was of the view that there was problem with the earlier definition of function which states that 'functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system'. According to him, there has been a tendency in the definition to observe only the positive contribution of an item to the social or cultural system in which it is implicated. But he asserts that there are some contributions of at least some social or cultural items, which, over a period result otherwise, i.e., they become an obstacle or hindrance to the adaptation or adjustment. Considering this possibility (which is at times empirically verifiable), he introduced the counter notion of 'dysfunction'. He defines dysfunctions as "those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of a given system". There is also an empirical possibility of non-functional consequences which are simply irrelevant for the system under consideration. He further elaborates the concept of function to 'consequences which are apparent and those which are hidden' by using the terms 'manifest functions' and 'latent functions'. It is not only a logical possibility or utopia but it is also found to be true in empirical situations. Merton was very well convinced of this reality and verified the role (function/contribution) of some social institutions, norms and traditions. This initial formulation serves as a starting point for examining the concept of function as propounded by earlier functionalists. He was an observer to the changes of his times that were occurring in the western societies in general and American Society in particular.

The earlier notion of function, as advanced by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski assumed that there was no stress or conflict in society (as the case might be in simpler societies) but in complex societies of his (Merton's) time stress or conflict was an important factor in social life. The stress indicates changes of some or the other kind, let alone the changes in functions of social institutions or social items. With these considerations he has examined the earlier formulation which he labeled as 'Prevailing Postulates of Functional Analysis (in Sociology)'. While formulating and using the concept of function Radcliffe-Brown states that "function of a particular usage is the contribution it makes to the total social life as the functioning of the total social system". Merton argues that this view implies that the social system has a certain kind of unity which may be called as functional unity. He considers functional unity as a condition where all parts of the social system work together with harmony and internal consistency (without producing any persistent conflicts). This view may be true when we look at small, highly integrated aboriginal tribes but when we look at highly differentiated complex

societies which have large realm, it is not so. Thereby Merton examines this 'postulate of functional unity' (codified from the notion given by Radcliffe-Brown) by tracing several illustrations. This unity of total society cannot be posited in advance of observation. The functional analysis requires that there should be specification of units for which the item is functional. The given item may have some functional consequences and some others as dysfunctional, thus, we may not assume full integration of all societies all the times.

Merton examines the second postulate of 'Universal Functionalism' extracted or codified from the views of Malinowski. Malinowski states that 'functional view of culture insists that in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea or belief fulfills some vital function'. According to Merton this may be true of small non-literate societies. Functionalists overreacted on the concept of survival and function of every cultural item. Because there are functions and dysfunctions of social items, what remains is the 'net balance of consequences (difference of positive and negative consequences)'. Thus, for complex societies he argues that the assertion must be on 'the net balance of consequences'.

He again takes up the third formulation, i.e., the third postulate codifying the earlier statement of Malinowski emphasizing the gravity of the word vital. Following the assertion, he takes the example of religion (a social institution) which is indispensable in society. To this view of Malinowski, i.e., 'Functional Indispensability', he argues that 'maintaining integration' is the indispensable need of the society but not the institution because same need can be satisfied by other social institutions in complex differentiated societies. Thus, Merton comes out with the concept of functional alternatives, equivalents or substitutes over the postulate of functional indispensability.

To all these considerations, examinations and reformations, Merton codified and summarized in the set of points/issues, what he calls it 'Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology'. His paradigm contains all these terms, concepts, possibility of their usage in empirical research in complex societies. This paradigm consists of eleven points from the concepts of function to the application and understanding change in the system elements. His theories are particularly presented in his classic book 'Social Theory and Social Structure'.

2.4   LET US SUM UP

Theoretical perspective of functionalism aims to understand society by the functioning of various parts (items, institutions, activities etc.) which contribute to the satisfaction of the vital needs of social system (society as a whole). The founding authors focused on the needs or necessary conditions of existence of society to which social institutions correspond. The parts or institutions are considered interrelated and interdependent. Society is perceived, like an organism of functionally interrelated component parts. These parts perform functions which are essential for the survival and continuity of society. Each element contributes positively to this maintenance. Later sociologists perceived, particularly in complex-differentiated societies, that there are some negative consequences of some institutions over a period of time as well. Parsons maintains that social system has in itself to contain these deviations (latency). Lastly Merton is of the view that the functions of institutions are substituted by other alternatives and thus stresses are overcome, some of which may always occur in the system. This may well be understood within functional analysis propounded by him.

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UNIT 3   STRUCTURALISM*

Structure

3.0   OBJECTIVES

In this unit; the student will learn about:

- The concept of structuralism and about its author;

- The theoretical perspectives that have gone into its formulation;

- The application of structuralism to analysis especially of myths and social institutions;

- The wider applications of structural approach; and

- Criticisms of the Structural Approach.

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Structuralism sounds like social structure and there is a relationship between them, but as a theory structuralism differs greatly from structure and function theory because of the methodology and the philosophical assumptions underlying it as well as the differences in the basic premises that guide them. While the concept of social structure basically observes and analyses the relationships between social persons, the concept of structuralism analyses the relationships between concepts or the names that cultures give to concepts. Structuralism operates at a much higher level of abstraction than does the concept of social structure. In other words while social structure as in the sociology of Durkheim and his follower A.R. Radcliffe-Brown refers to behavior and processes of social relationships, structuralism refers to the logical structures of the human mind. Since the mind is common to all humans, structural analysis is ideally context free. This is quite different from structural- functional analysis that is specifically contextualised to the society and culture of which the data is being analysed. Levi-Strauss thus said that the structural analysis of any myth is completely free of the context of the culture in which it is found. Thus while structural-functionalism believes in holistic methods and the analysis of whole culture, Structuralism proceeds by the analysis of isolated bits of culture and are more generalised and comparative in their approach. As we proceed you will be referred

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to some more of the specific differences and contrasts between the concepts of social structure and of structuralism.

3.2 CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS AND STRUCTURALISM

Claude Levi-Strauss the French philosopher and anthropologists is singularly credited with the concept and method of structuralism. He conceptualised society not as a network of relationship like most sociologists but as composed of a system of exchange between groups, of which marriage or the exchange of women is the primary component. Structuralism however refers to the theory of the structures of the human mind and its application to society is mainly concerned with how the members of a society use a binary system of symbols to make sense of their world. When Levi-Strauss is referring to structure, he is not referring to the overt structures that are visible on the surface, like the dyad of kinship relationships referred to by A.R. Radcliffe Brown, but the deeper and unconscious logical structures that lie under the overt structures. These structures are conceptual and highly abstract and very significantly not accessible to the actors of the society. They can only be accessed by the analyst.

Thus Structuralism is a purely positivist approach. It looks upon society as a system of logical structures. It draws upon both psychology and linguistics; but in terms of psychology, it is referring to the universal mind, not the cross- cultural psychology we are familiar with today, but the classical positivist psychology that refers to the unconscious. In terms of linguistics, he is not concerned with the subjective content of what is understood as speech but the formal properties of *langue*, or the grammatical structure of language. Here Levi-Strauss was directly influenced by the Linguistic Structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, who actually coined the term Structuralism in his publications that date from the late 1920's to the early 1930s. According to Saussure, language is constructed out of invisible rules that the speakers know but are unable to articulate. Thus all native speakers of a language can speak it perfectly and will also know the right way to speak it. They will also be able to point out if someone makes a mistake but they may still not know the basic rules of grammar and they certainly will not know the structures of the language that is known only to a specialist linguist. So the speaking of the language is internalized at the level of the unconscious without explicit knowledge. Thus with culture too, practitioners know the rules and the right ways, but they do not know the reasons, that are buried deep below the surface. Thus the aim of the anthropologist would be to look deep underneath to understand what the basic rules on which the culture operates are.

Levi-Strauss also drew inspiration from his predecessors in French sociology, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss (1963 Tr.) and also the Russian structural linguist, Roman Jacobson, who was his colleague in the New School in New York where Strauss taught after World War II. Jacobson belonged to the Prague School of and Levi-Strauss derived his concept of binary contrasts from his work. The paradigm of binary contrasts postulates that the human mind primarily understands any phenomenon by contrasts, thus light is understood only in contrast to dark, life in contrast to death, fast in contrast to slow and so on. There are hardly any concepts that are stand alone. In philosophy his strongest

influence is Hegel from whom he borrowed his dialectical process of understanding and explanation that we see so clearly in his analysis of myth and stories. Thus to understand a cultural element like a myth it should be broken down into its constituent parts and then these need to be arranged into opposed binaries. In the next section of this essay we will learn more about the analysis of myth. The most important aspect to emphasize here is the assertion made by Levi-Strauss that the analysis of myths or any other aspect of a culture is possible without referring to the whole. In this aspect he is directly opposed to the empirical, holistic approach of the structural-functionalists. In his opinion the function of any element of culture is not to produce social solidarity or to contribute to the functioning of the whole; but to transmit a message. These meanings too are not culture specific but belong to the universal realm of the human mind. They are generated to aid the human mind to understand the world around them in the only way possible to any human that is by creating oppositions.

Thus structuralism also makes claim to be what may be called a generalised theory that has universal application. In this way structuralism has been used by its followers to analyse disparate bits of culture and also to use it in a comparative way. Thus the scientific method of comparison and of assuming an objective outsider stand is one of the principle paradigms of the structuralism of Levi-Strauss.

Check Your Progress

1) Discuss the principle and salient aspects of Structuralism as given by Levi-Strauss.

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2) What were the major intellectual influences upon Levi-Strauss in his formulation of Structuralism.

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3) In what ways is structuralism different from the structural-functional theory?

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3.3   THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE AS UNDERSTOOD BY LEVI-STRAUSS

To Levi-Strauss, culture was only a means of communication, a system of transmission of meanings that held society together as a system of exchange. All myths, folklore, stories and even ritual practices and beliefs which make up the essential fabric of what we understand as culture, were like vehicles for the transmission of meaning (Burridge 1963:98). Levi-Strauss counter posed relational structure and psychology, the structure of the human mind. To him the structure of the mind is reflected and used in the cultural artifacts that also facilitate the maintenance of society that is nothing to him but a system exchange. Levi-Strauss (1963a) looked for the origin of culture, especially the reason for the transition from nature to culture and found the reason in the incest taboo that converted biological mating (nature) into marriage (culture) in human societies.

According to Levi-Strauss, the most primary form of exchange is marriage, or the circulation of women to cement the bond of exchange between groups. But how are human groups created? In the simplest societies, the most elementary form of exchange takes place because of the universal rule of incest that prevents access of some social groups to their own women and they have to look to other groups to give them women and the relations of alliance are formed. Negating the psychological and natural theories of incest prohibition, Levi-Strauss understands it as a cultural strategy that makes society possible. Cultural practices, beliefs and other aspects.

He extends this argument to say that the most disparate appearing beliefs and practices in the most disparate of cultures can be explained on the basis of identical logic, that of primary oppositions. In his well-known essay, "The Bear and the Barber"(1963b), he shows how one can explain Totemism among the Australian Aborigines who are a simple, undifferentiated society of hunters and food gatherers, with the caste system of the complex society of the agricultural and urban economy of Hindus of India. But if one goes to the basic logic of operation of the two systems one will be able to see them as similar in their basic structure.

In both cases the primary requirement of any society is to create groups that should be able to engage in exchange relationships. Since humans, if not mediated by culture are identical, there is no need for any exchange unless the conditions are created to mark out groups as different from each other. Totemism is a form of belief that attributes qualities of nature to human groups by stipulating a kinship between them and some natural being or phenomenon, like animals, birds or even natural phenomenon like water, wind or thunder. Although Totemism has been explained in functional terms by Durkheim and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown as contributing to what Durkheim had called as "collective consciousness" and an internalized moral order, Levi-Strauss has taken a completely different stand. In accordance with his basic theoretical premise that culture is a mode of communication, Levi-Strauss made his statement that "Totems are good to think" to counter Radcliffe-Brown's assertion that "Totems are good to eat". According to Radcliffe-Brown, the totems stood for those natural elements that were of social value. But according to Levi-Strauss, the totems were classificatory signifiers that separated one group from another. In the

Australian Aborigine society, the kinship or linages are the primary units of society and are bound to each other by the principle of lineage exogamy. It is believed that all members of a lineage are descended from a common ancestor, therefore they are related to each other by blood and cannot marry. In a homogenous society like the Australian Aborigines, there is actually nothing to distinguish one person from another except for the universal differences of age and sex. Thus the different lineage groups are distinguished by the totems with which they are associated as they are also believed to be akin in quality to their totemic ancestor. Thus the differences of nature provide the codes by which human groups can be identified and also opposed or compared to each other. Thus the bird people can be contrasted with the land people, carnivores with the herbivores, and water people with the fire people and so on. Thus cultural differences are drawn from nature but the women are considered as naturally equivalent so that they can rotate between groups to create and maintain social bonds.

In the caste society, there is a complex relationship between the groups that are marked by a cultural division of labour; each group specialising in some task that makes the others dependent on it. The natural similarity between the women is now done away with the cultural differences imposed by caste divisions. So the caste groups are endogamous and the differences are drawn from culture and not from nature. Thus the caste groups use culture to justify differences so that instead of the natural similarity of women and their exchange to maintain social bonds the cultural differences created by a strict division of labour bonds society together.

Thus to Levi-Strauss both totemism and caste system have the same purpose; to mark differences and contrasts between groups so that they can exchange, women in the first case and services in the second. In both cases the non-existence of differences is created by cultural coding that provides contrasts and differences where none actually exist. Thus culture is viewed as a coding system, something that sends messages to the mind and is not 'a way of life' or compounding of behaviour patterns. The most important conclusion of this way of understanding cultures is that it takes away the unique ethnographic content of culture and focuses only on its structure that is the same across all cultures.

3.4   THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MYTHS

According to Levi-Strauss (1963c) the purpose of a myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a (real) contradiction. To understand a myth it must be broken down into its constituent elements and understood as binary opposites. This breakdown is the structure, as the constituent elements are always organised in a particular way (the underlying structure) that needs to be analysed. The structure is the form and the details of the story are the content. Similarly there is a category of behaviour and the actual behavior. Thus for example, 'sacrifice' is a category of behaviour and the actual content is the ethnographic details (Who? What? Where, Why? Etc.; But when analysing the structure of the myth, it is the form and not the content that is taken into account. Thus to analyse a myth, 'sacrifice' would be an element, irrespective of the details of the ritual. When whittled down to their most basic forms, the variety of myths begin to look similar. Thus the most basic pattern of a story is the formula (its structure) situation-complication-resolution-rider or twist- and the last term is the precursor

of another situation where it is resolved and followed by another rider. The story can end when there is no need for further resolution. This follows a more Hegelian than Marxian mode of thinking, where the thesis produces its antithesis that leads to a third situation or the synthesis.

Levi-Strauss analysed large number of myths, of which his analysis of the myth of Asdiwal is very well known. At every instance the myth is broken down into opposed categories and these are then subjected to transformations to see their similarity to other myths. Thus the core of Levi-Strauss's analysis is pivoted around the proposition that the human mind is capable of recognizing only limited number of structural patterns, because of its innate limitation to cognition. Thus opposition is a key process of comprehension and homology is another. So we can understand something either by likeness or by contrast. The patterns of these limited sets are related to each other by a series of, what he refers to as 'transformation rules'. Thus in his large corpus of work on myths he attempts to justify his structural rules by taking the examples from many myths, only to show how any myth from one set of myths, can be transformed to some other member of a set.

Caroll (1977) has simplified the more complex rules of transformation given by Levi-Strauss, into the following two rules.

Transformation Rule One: is that starting with two roles, X and Y which are related to each other in a particular way

1 (a) Negate the outcome associated with each role

1(b) Move the actor originally in one of the roles, say X into the role Y and move a new actor in role X.

Transformation Rule Two

Given a sequence of events, negate the outcome of each event and reverse the ordering of the events.

Many scholars including Caroll have applied these rules to the Biblical myths of Genesis.

The most famous analysis of Biblical myths (myths from the Christian Bible) has been done by Edmund Leach, Levi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden (1961) and Genesis as Myth (1962). Leach used the terms 'opposition' and 'mediation' for the analysis of myths in the same sense as Levi-Strauss (1963c). The term opposition is used to refer to a pair of categories, so that there is an obvious conceptual difference between two things that are put in two different categories. A mediating category is one that has something in common with the two opposed categories. These mediating categories serve to resolve the opposition, by psychologically linking the two opposed categories in the human mind.

Let us understand this by reference to his analysis of the Book of Genesis, in the Bible where the creation of the universe has been described. According to Christian beliefs, God created entire universe in six days and then rested on the seventh. It is in accordance to Christian beliefs, Sunday is a no working day. In the Bible it is called the day of the Sabbath. On each of the other six days, that we now call a week, God created some things and also assigned them a purpose or a meaning.

First Day: Heaven was distinguished from Earth, Light from Darkness, Day from Night and Evening from Morning.

Thus according to Leach, on the first day, oppositions are created that are immutable and static. Thus heaven and earth, light and dark and morning and evening remain opposed to this day, with no change possible and provide static oppositions for the mind.

On the Fourth Day, God created the Moon and the Sun are created that move on a fixed firmament. And because the movements of the Sun cause alternate dark and light, they appear as oppositional. Thus according to Leach, the static opposition introduced on the first day turn into a dynamic opposition on the fourth day. He then extrapolates the opposition of Light and Dark into an opposition between Life and Death and these are then shown as the oppositions that exist between Eve and Adam as that between fertility and non-fertility. God also creates water above the firmament in the form of rain and below the firmament in the form of oceans, which again according to Leach are opposed as the water above or the rains are associated with fertility as they help to raise the crops and the water below, the oceans are not fertile, they are often associated with darkness and death. In Greek mythology, Hades (the place where the dead go) lies under the ocean. In keeping with his model Leach identifies the firmament as the mediator between light and dark, life and death as represented by the waters above and the waters below.

Similarly Leach says that while creating living things, God created the cattle and the wild animals and he also created the creeping animals. Thus to Leach, the opposition between the domestic and the wild is mediated by the creeping creatures, who occupy an in between position.

The most interesting of Leach's structural analysis is his analysis of Time. In the structural analysis of time Leach treats time, neither as a linear (western view) entity where each moment is gone and never comes back. Neither does he quite take the view that time is circular. According to him Time is best understood as structured intervals that mark out one moment from another or as reversals or oppositions that mark such intervals. Thus a stream of water is not continuous but the interval between one drop and the next by which time can be marked.

He applied his analysis to the structural analysis of the myth of Cronus (the Greek god of time) and the analysis of rituals, both life cycle and the annual cycle rituals whose main function is to mark intervals so that people are aware of the passing of time, either in the form of transformation of status in an individuals' life or the passing of and coming again of a particular time of the annual cycle, to tell us that a year (or an interval of time) has passed. Thus every ritual is a symbolic reversal of the society, like reversal of roles in a carnival and the shedding of social control in certain rituals like the Hindu festival of Holi. According to Leach, the rituals mark the interval or liminal time between the then and the now, between the past and the present. Liminality is marked by either suspension or reversal of ordinary status and role. During festivals people take a break from ordinary activities and do things that they do not do normally. These breaks are the mediators and are the symbolic markers by which people comprehend the passage of time in the absence of any other technological means of knowing.

Thus structural analysis was proposed by Levi-Strauss in the context of social analysis and among his most original and well known followers who developed the method of structural analysis to a very large extent was Edmund Leach. But there were others too. During the 70's and 80's structural analysis was very popular but it lost its luster in the subsequent years with the rise of another kind of anthropology, namely the subjective and reflexive methods of post-modern anthropology.

Check Your Progress

1) How did Lev-Strauss apply structural analysis to myths? Discuss with some examples.

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2) What are the rules of transformation that can be applied to myths to link one myth with another?

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3) How did Leach apply structural analysis to Genesis myths? Describe with examples.

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4) How has Leach applied structural analysis to understand Time?

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5) What is the concept of liminal in structural analysis of rituals?

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3.5 ETHNOGRAPHY AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

One aspect of structural analysis has remained rather ambiguous, namely how much does ethnography feed into the analysis. Levi-Strauss at some points has emphasized the role of field data, especially when he puts forward his concept of social structure. Unlike the concept of social structure put forward by Radcliffe-Brown, Levi-Strauss defines social structure as a model (1953). However he has also said that there are two kinds of models, mechanical models and statistical models. These models differ in term of their scale and comparison to actual data. According to Levi-Strauss, if the model is at the same scale as the field data we may say that it is a mechanical model and if the scale is different, it is a statistical model. For example if in a society we have a rule of marriage that is prescribed and every one adheres to it. Then we can say that this society has a mechanical social structure. For example in South India there is a rule that a girl marries her mother's brother's daughter. If a majority of people marry according to this rule then the social structure is of the mechanical kind. If however, due to some conditions of social change, like education and market economy, people may not always follow the rule of prescription but start to apply other criteria for looking for a groom for their daughter, like education, good job etc., then the rule for marrying one's mother's brother daughter is no longer applied mechanically. One has to then examine the data statistically to find out exactly how many marriages are taking place according to prescriptive rules and how many according to other criteria. Then the society has a statistical model. In another example, we may consider a society where there is no prescriptive rule of marriage like in the USA. Yet if a statistical analysis of actual marriages is done for USA, one may find some preferential rules emerging, like marriage within the same race or same class. Thus, even if there is not prescriptive rule, yet some unwritten or statistical rules are thrown up by the data. Thus, ethnography is also important in determining social structure as it is understood in structural analysis.

In the structural analysis of myths, the myths and stories are taken from the field but their analysis does not include the interpretation that the informants or the people to whom they belong place on it. In fact Levi-Strauss advises that the analyst should completely ignore the interpretations that he or she gets from the field and not use them for his own analysis as they may cloud the analyst's interpretation that need to be based on pure logic and not on subjective interpretations. In this way structuralism tends towards a deductive rather than an inductive analysis.

Check Your Progress

1) Is ethnography important in structural analysis? Discuss.

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2) What do you understand by mechanical and statistical models? Discuss with examples.

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3.6   CRITICAL POINTS OF VIEW

Structuralism was popular for some time but there were many criticisms most of which pertained to the role played by the analyst in the interpretations and explanations. According to Lett (1987{ 103) , since structural analysis depended so much on the point of view of the person doing the analysis, it was quite improbable that two people will come to the exactly same conclusions. Let us as an example take the critical appraisal of Leach's analysis of the Genesis by Michael Caroll. Referring to the claim made by Leach that light and day stand for life and death; Caroll says that careful reading of the Book of Genesis does not tell us that anywhere such an analogy has been drawn. The problem with structural analysis has been that the analysts have become attracted to what appeared to them to be oppositions, contradictions and analogies. Thus pursuing his criticism further based again on a careful reading of the Bible, he also differs from Leach to say that there is nothing again to say that the crawling animals are mediators between the domestic and wild animals, for according to Leach, a mediator should have something in common with both the opposing categories, but crawling animals are simply a third kind of animals that have nothing in common with either cattle or animals in the forest. Thus according to Caroll, the Genesis tells us God created three kinds of animals that can neither be opposed to each other nor is there any category that can be called as a mediator. "Leach is thus imposing binary category on things that were not meant to be opposed". In the same way, the opposition between fertile rain above the firmament and sterile water below it is nowhere justified in the text. There is enough in the verses to say that the waters below are also fertile and aid in the growth of vegetation. If the waters are not opposed then the firmament cannot be a mediator. Similarly the opposition of Adam and Eve as representing infertility and fertility is unjustified as in the text of Genesis, Adam and Eve are described as similar (one flesh) and the role of Adam in procreation is recognized.

Thus the thoughts although apparently logical tend to impose an outsider's logic upon the data. Materialists like Marvin Harris have also criticized structuralism for ignoring the obvious and going for some kind of exotic explanations. Thus Levi-Strauss had analysed the representation of the coyote (a kind of wild dog common in the prairies of USA) as a trickster in many Native American myths, as an in between animal. A trickster is one that plays tricks and mystifies people, often making fools out of them. The coyote is an animal that preys on both herbivores and carnivores and is associated with both agriculture and hunting. Thus according to Levi-Strauss it is an in between animal as it is associated with both life (agriculture) and death (hunting). As a trickster is symbolizes it's neither this not that status, as it is not fixed to one identity. It is thus a deviation from the natural order, an abnormal category of animal. According to Harris, a more obvious explanation would have been the coyote enjoys a special status

because it is an intelligent and opportunistic animal. Many scholars thus viewed structural analysis as deviating.

Maurice Godelier incorporated a dynamic aspect into his structural analysis of Australian Aborigine marriage class systems and their relationship to demographic factors. He did this by incorporating a Marxist methodology into his analysis where transformation is traced to contradictions of the structure.

The major criticism of the structural analysis was it's a historical character. It did not take into account either history or transformation. Most of the analysis thus confined itself to age old myths and primordial institutions that were taken as unchanging. Take for example Levi-Strauss' analysis of caste is only about the division of labour and caste endogamy; but there are all the various cultural, social, historical and political aspects of caste that have not been covered in his analysis.

The feminists have been specifically critical of Levi-Strauss treating the women only as objects of exchange. In his theory of how society is structured, Levi-Strauss has emphasized that the circulation of women among various groups is the binding force of society and is brought about by the universal principle of incest.

Check Your Progress

1)   What are the main criticisms of the Structural Analysis? Give some examples.

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2)   What alternate ways of application of structural analysis were evolved by other scholars?

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3.7   LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed in detail what is structuralism and the various debates that exists within structuralism or that it has initiated in the discussion of folklore, society and culture. It will be evident to you that structuralism emerged as one of the most important theoretical approach in social sciences and folklore studies. The unit also discusses critique of structuralism, viz. the drawbacks of assuming that social existence can be primarily studied in terms of systems.

We have principally focused on the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, illustrating it with the example of totemism, since he is regarded as the main exponent of this method. As was stated earlier, Levi-Strauss worked on kinship, totemism, and myths, and was interested in discovering the underlying structures, which he thought were universal. He was interested in knowing how human mind worked.

That was where his contemporaries and scholars sympathetic to his approach differed with him. They thought that Levi-Strauss was too ambitious in his approach. The structures he was looking for were more his creation than those that emerged from the facts of actual existence. These scholars applied structuralism to the understanding of local, regional systems.

The British anthropologist Edmund Leach was certainly critical of the structural-functional ideas, but one thing he learnt from this was researching people's actual ideas, rather than discovering the so-called universal mental structures.

Structuralism is a historical, which means that the structures it discovers cut across the time dimension. These are applicable to all societies at all points of time. This is one proposition of structuralism that has invited a number of criticisms. A good method is one which takes care of both the dimensions of time and space.

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UNIT 4   CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE*

Structure

4.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Introduction to the concept of Conflict in Sociology;

- The Classical Approach to the sociology of conflict;

- The contribution of major scholars; and

- The way conflict theory has adapted to modern society;

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Early in sociological theory there was a digression from conventional structural theory of social solidarity. The most fundamental distinction between functionalism and conflict theory is not that the notion of either structure or of change is absent from either of them but which of these holds center stage. Although conflict theory became accepted into sociological theory only in the twentieth century and obtained a specific label as a sub-branch with the work of Ralph Dahrendorf and Coser; it has been implicit in historiography from the time of ancient Greek thinkers like Thucydides. Conflict theory and functional theory consider both structure and change, for both are necessary aspect of all societies. Conflict and social change can only happen to existing structures and if we are looking at change, there is a need to begin with an entity, a social structure that changes. However unlike functionalists, conflict theorists consider conflict to be central to social structure, pushing it towards inevitable change. Conflict is seen as both contributive to positive stability as well as to anomic change. Thus concepts of social solidarity and stability appear in conflict theory as they appear in functional theory, but it only remains a matter of how these concepts are viewed and used in explanations of formation, maintenance and change in social organisations and relationships.

For a sociological perspective it is imperative to consider social groups as basic units and not individuals. In other words, conflict between individuals is not of scholarly interests but only that between groups. The identification and

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classification of such groups that can have a potential or actual conflicting relationship is central to conflict theory.

At the very basic level conflict theory assumes the existence of stratification, inequality and domination as integral aspects of all societies. Thus most social action is informed by the needs of either maintenance of inequality or to contest domination. Unequal distribution of social resources is both cause and effect of inequality and hierarchy and remains a moot cause of conflict. Escalation of conflict to a critical level may lead to social change leading to a new set of organisational principles that ensures that social resources are redistributed. For example the Russian revolution led to an overthrow of monarchy and its replacement by a communist/socialist regime. The conflict between the aristocrats and the common people had escalated to the extent that it led to the killing of the entire family of the Romanovs and complete turnaround of the power structures.

Inequality is both caused by and is itself causative of an uneven distribution of power. Thus inequality and the dynamic aspects of hierarchy remains a central concern of conflict theorists. The later generation of conflict theorists used power in more innovative ways to suit modern societies with different structures of control and domination. While discussing conflict theory the student needs to be careful in the choice of terminology as words that apparently look similar may have different meanings; for example differentiation and stratification and also contradiction and conflict. Thus differentiation does not necessarily involve stratification unless there is inequality and contradiction does not necessarily lead to conflict unless it precipitates a consolidation and confrontation of power leading to action. Potentialities for conflict does not mean that actual conflict will take place and even if conflict does occur it may not have the intensity for large scale social transformation.

4.2   THE CLASSICAL THEORISTS

The earliest theories of conflict were macro-historical in that they were concerned with the larger transformations that could take place in the structure of society due to conflict between its major social groups that are also interest groups often opposed in their goals. Sustained characters of the system that were naturally opposed were seen as historical conditions for evolution or transformation. The foremost among the early macro-sociologist who gave a comprehensive theory of social transformation through the operation of conflict between different segments of society was Karl Marx, in the nineteenth century. His theory of historical materialism paved the way for the formation of a conflict theory of social transformation based upon the essential contradiction that exists between classed based upon unequal economic distribution in society. According to him property (or capital) ownership gives rise to the bourgeoisie and the proletariats are the workers whose labour is exploited to keep the bourgeoisie in power. In political terms this was translated into a conflict between the haves and the have-nots, as put forward in the Communist Manifesto. But as a theorist and historiographer, Marx recognized a far more complex and nuanced reality as he chronicled the various historical epochs. His theory of social evolution was also predictive as he had visualized that feudalism will give way to capitalism (a process that was already underway) and then it will be followed by socialism (an obliteration of the concept of private property) where society would reach stability as all class contradictions would disappear. History tells us that this did

not happen so his theory was proved politically incorrect although the method of dialectics, of contradictory forces clashing to produce a third stage of stability or of new oppositions as the driving force of history was accepted and is the basic premise of conflict theory in sociology. But the sociological theory of conflict is essentially non-political; it neither favours communism nor capitalism or any other political ideology. The aim is to identify the various social groups and social forces that produce change and to produce a general theory of social structures and their organisation from a dynamic perspective.

The next major classical theorists can be identified as Max Weber. His major improvement upon Marxian theory was to show that the economy was not alone responsible for stratification and in addition to economic classes there are the status groups and power groups based on non-economic sources that were also responsible for social stratification. Weber also focused on forms of social organizations as it is through its various organisations that major weapons of conflict and revolt are developed and it is through organisations that society asserts its weapons of domination and control. Thus Weber had identified three ideal types of organisational structures, ideal-typical, bureaucratic and patrimonial which exist within any form of domination, a state a church or the economy. By introducing the concept of legitimacy into power, Weber was able to show how certain forms of domination become acceptable and may continue even if they are exploitative and discriminatory. There are social mechanisms such as socialisation that ensure that people at large accept institutions such as church and state, at least up to a point and alternate organisations, that challenge them must develop their own legitimacy and structure in order to be effective. Thus resisting forces need to organise too and develop internal bureaucracy in order to be effective. Organisations such a new political parties that originate in charismatic leadership also settle down to rational-legal and even traditional forms of leadership. Thus they may follow an election process for next generation of leadership (bureaucratic) or follow dynastic rule (traditional). A particular religious reform such as the Protestant reform (called Protestant because it protested against the existing edicts of the Catholic Church) came into existence because of the charismatic leadership of an individual Martin Luther, but later it acquired an organisation and now has an internal bureaucracy and status hierarchy like any other organisation. The present leaders of the protestant church are often not charismatic but only rational-legal (passing exams and getting training) and may only occasionally combine charisma with the more formal requirements. Thus although major transformations took place with this protest movement and initially there was and sometimes there still is violent conflict (as in Ireland) over the division of the Christian church, yet the new forms have become routinized and form a status based hierarchy. Weber had a lasting influence over the later development of sociology although all the scholars who came later did not build up on his contribution but followed their own path.

A major contributor to the classical conflict theory was Lewis Coser. Born in Berlin in 1913, he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and was arrested during the WWII for being German and interned by the French government. He got asylum in the USA and did his Ph. D from Columbia University, New York, under Robert K Merton. Coser deviated from Weber and followed instead Simmel. He was of the opinion that conflict in inherent not just in society but in the human person; it is a part of our instinctual behaviour as humans. He put forward the concepts of absolute and relative deprivation. Absolute deprivation occurs when a human

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group is subject to utter lack of resources to the extent that people are barely able to survive. They lack the most basic amenities like food, drinking water, health care, housing etc. The concept relative deprivation is used for those who are better off but having some level of survival resources are able to think and compare themselves with others who are much better off. Relative deprivation is more likely to occur when society as a whole is not too badly equipped but there are very stark disparities between the rich and the ordinary people. As observed, people living in absolute poverty rarely engage in violence as they simply do not have the capacity to do so. For example we hear about people in remote rural areas suffering from starvation, yet we never hear about such people engaging in conflict. However, as Coser points out, when people make the transition from absolute to relative deprivation, the chances of conflict increase. For example, the Dalit movement began, not from the rural areas where the untouchables lived a life of bare survival and utter misery. It began from the urban industrial areas, where the rural poor had migrated as wage labour. Although they were poor and exploited, yet they had some cash income and because as industrial labour, they worked in larger groups, they were able to come together and organise under the charismatic leadership of B.R. Ambedkar. Only when they came to urban cities and became exposed to urban life, were they able to comprehend their exploitation and reflect on their life conditions in a comparative perspective.

Coser also identified levels of conflict as arising from different social situations and conditions of development of conflict. When people have clearly defined goals which are both pragmatic and rational, the escalation and persistence of violence can be less likely. Since goals are clearly defined and achievable, such as say, higher salary for workers or better living conditions for urban poor; conflict will fizzle out once the demands are met. For example workers on strike may call off the strike. More violent and persistent levels of conflict arise if the goals are emotionally charged and transcendental. One may take as example the prolonged conflicts over religion, ethnic identities and sub-nationalisms. Such emotionally charged and esoteric goals are unresolvable, like the persistent violence in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants that is unresolvable but often erupts into great violence.

Following the functional school of his times, Coser also identified the functional aspects of conflict by classifying conflict into two types, namely, external and internal to the group. Conflict that is internal to the groups is mostly of the low intensity but frequent type. When two (or more) potentially hostile groups live in close proximity to each other, like Whites and Blacks in the USA or Hindus and Muslims in India, Protestants and Catholics in Great Britain; there is likelihood of small scale and frequent skirmishes between them. However for most of the time, such low intensity violence can be brought under control by the internal law and order maintenance mechanisms and tensions tend to diffuse out, leading to relatively long periods of peace. The positive aspect of such small scale conflict is that it leads to better organisation of administrative machinery and also to have more evolved norms of conduct. For example frequent flare ups between workers and management, potentially damaging to the economy is controlled by improved labour laws. External conflict likewise tends to increase internal cohesion of the group and also draw more clearly defined boundaries.

4.3   MODERN CONFLICT SCHOOLS

The nomenclature of a Conflict perspective in sociology, in more recent times is attributed to Ralph Dahrendorf, who, also coming from Germany was the director of the London School of Economics for many years and from where he built up a recognized school of sociology of conflict. With reference to the existing sociological theories of his time, Dahrendorf was of the opinion that neither Marxism nor structural-functionalism was adequate to explain modern, industrial capitalist societies. The failure of Marxism lay in its inability to recognize the power of consensus and integration in contemporary democracies. Further, Parson's structural functionalism does recognize change and Marxism cannot describe its theory of contradiction without presupposing an existing structure. Thus, no society least of all modern democracies are without both integrative and conflictual forces appearing side by side. What is most apparent is the far greater complexity of social structures than the dialectical model used in Marxism. In modern society there are many more varied forms of class than the bourgeoisie and proletariat visualized by Marx as the primary contradictions of society. Social inequality is no longer a matter of one strata having power and another being exploited. In modern industrial society, the workers are supported by trade unions, collective bargaining and legislative measures. Other agencies like International Labour Unions and Human Rights Commissions also intervene under many conditions.

The individual ownership of private property has been largely mitigated by the appearance of Joint Stock Companies, where as much as the capitalist owners, the managers and share- holders also have key roles to play. Thus Dahrendorf, in his classic work, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (1959:238) has given his own definition of class as follows,"By social class shall be understood such organized or unorganised collectivities of individuals as share manifest or latent interests arising from and related to the authority structure of imperatively coordinated associations. It follows from the definitions of latent and manifest interests that social classes are always conflict groups". At a more generalized level and to account for the variations in interest holding groups and the complex nature of property and authority, Dahrendorf makes a broad division between the ''command class' and 'obey class' and class conflict would then refer to the conflict between those with authority and those without. But the drawback of this proposition is that social classes would exist in particular situations only as some people may be in authority in some place and may not be in another. Moreover social classes will be present all though society and cease to have any structural relevance. Thus for the structural and static notion of hierarchy Dahrendorf preferred to use the term strata and regarded class as a dynamic phenomenon of real society.

Another significant scholar of conflict theory is Gerhard Lenski. By the twentieth century, sociologists were more concerned with power as it was distributed in society and the manner in which it was applied, than simply in the concept of class as an economic category or static stratification. Lenski (1966:75) defined class as an "aggregate of persons in society who stand in a similar position with respect to some form of power, privilege and prestige". More recent sociologists had to understand the play of power in society that was more dynamic, diverse and where there were many more positions to be filled and many sources from

which power could be drawn. The main question was to explain the basis on which power was distributed, who got what and why? Thus the concept of class was replaced by the concept of power classes.

In modern society there are layers of authority and control and like in a corporate structure, a large number of persons may be involved at various levels. It is possible that mangers who have administrative authority do not get to use the profit that they help to make. The workers can put pressure and get their share of the profit through collective action. Thus authority and control may not always mean that the same people are enjoying all the profit thus generated. Wright (1979:18) thus modified the concept of class to bring the definition closer to the Marxian concept of appropriation. "Classes are defined by relations of appropriation of surplus product and secondarily defined by the relations of control over technical division of labour and relations of authority". Thus managers are separated from the owners.

However conflict often remains latent and not manifest as long as the principle of legitimacy is applicable to those in power. Thus in modern societies also, some people, by virtue of their education and expertise may be seen to be naturally fit for a position of authority and others will obey without question. Thus proper basis for legitimation of authority will lead to a stable state of society and conflict may emerge when such legitimate reasons are challenged or questioned.

4.4 ELITE THEORY

Scholars like Lenski and Dahrendorf also brought in the concept of elites to explain social class and consequent conflict in society. The genesis of Elite theory is attributed to Vilfredo Pareto, an economist and political scientist (born of an Italian father and French mother in 1848) whose academic life flourished in Florence was also a classical theorist who believed in societies and social systems whose natural state was one of equilibrium. He followed Adam Smith in advocating for a liberal doctrine and free exchange with an aversion for state control. He saw power as the manifestation of corruption and malice and all these manifested in the state. However he attributed all differentiation and stratification to natural causes such a unequal capabilities, age, sex, physical strength and health as well as to demographic variables like fertility and fecundity. Therefore the resultant conflicts, contradictions and struggles were inevitable and natural. Even if sociologists could understand them, they could do nothing to eliminate them. While he acknowledged that society was in a constant state of change, he did not believe in linear progression, but believed that change was better represented as fluctuation and curves. In this respect as in all others, his theory of conflict is almost diametrically opposed to that of Marx.

He did not attribute any causation to economic or organisational factors but attributed everything to natural causes, blaming the nature of human beings instead. He defined elites as those who from within a group or class try to dominate others. The only was elites can continue to be in power, is spite of struggles to over throw them is either by using force to eliminate the opposition or by absorbing them within their fold. This process which he calls endosmosis is process of social circulation by which social mobility takes place for individuals but the class structure of society remains unaffected.

Lenski had defined four types of elites, but they had already been identified by Pareto in terms of their innate nature. Coercive elites (lions in Pareto's terminology), Inducing elites (foxes), Expert elites (owls) and Commanding elites (bears). These are ideal types (Weber) and may overlap in actual situations. Thus a person who is an expert can also be commanding and coercive. One who is inducing, that is makes use of strategy, can at the same time be commanding, and so on. Dahrendorf's postulation of command class and obey class also follow the same formula of an elite and a governed class.

According to John Scott (2001), the classical elite theory is meaningless in terms of being too inclusive. Thus when we are talking of broad categories like Dahrendorf and Pareto, the definition of power being too inclusive loses its meaning. He postulated that positional studies should be replaced by more dynamic categories. Also that power should only be defined according to the effect that it has. Thus real social power can be defined in terms of the power wielder's conscious effort to affect the conduct of those who are subordinated. Thus, a real elite cannot be defined in terms of ability or status but should be confined to those who can actually exercise power, or have the potential to exercise it. Since power cannot be exercised in a vacuum, elite theory or the concept of social power can only be visualized in terms of two parties to it; the one exercising and the other on whom it is being exercised.

Thus power relations are intrinsically asymmetrical and therefore involve at least two parties with conflicting interests and goals. Elite theory with its emphasis on hierarchy and exercise of social power thus is essentially a conflict theory.

4.5 RECENT TRENDS IN CONFLICT THEORY

In the more recent times, there has been a trend towards cultural construction of institutional structures more than on relational structures. One of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault brought about a paradigm shift in the understanding of power. Unlike all conventional understandings of power, Foucault was of the opinion that power is not concentrated in specific agents or strata but is diffused in all aspects of society. Power need not be always destructive but can be as aspect of collective effort towards improvement and production. Foucault used the concept of capillary power to describe power that is diffuse and can be used in any situation and by anyone. Even in a group of friends, a certain person can take control in a particular situation, like sudden crises; someone takes ill at a picnic or a school bus goes into an accident and so on. According to Foucault, conflict, negotiation and contradictions are part of every relationship.

John Scott explains that power can be broadly understood as having two kinds of influence. Corrective influence that operates through punishments and rewards and persuasive influence that operates through arguments, appeals and reasoning. The former can be divided into two types, use of force and manipulations and the second type also has two forms, signification and legitimation. The latter becomes effective by a collective belief and operates through shared cognitive meanings and value commitments. This does not mean that the latter is less exploitative or does not actually support hierarchy, but that it makes people believe otherwise. The latter process is able to contain conflict and prevent any kind of dissent because it manages to hide the reality of the situation.

Foucault had throughout his works shown how the most effective modes of control are those that are least obvious. Randall Collins (1975) added a micro-level to the macro-level of conflict theory. Like Foucault, he too located conflict in the processes of day to day life. All relationships are based on some antagonism, domination and conflict on the one hand and there are also patterns of solidarity on the other. Unlike the sweeping generalized metatheories of the classical conflict theorists, the more recent scholars like Collins, depended more on empirical data and more grounded theorisation. Collins made use of Goffman's model of interaction rituals, using the concepts of front stage and back stage performance. These refer to the play acting people resort to when putting up a front stage performance. Goffman had likened all social interaction to stage performances for most of us pretend and say and do things that we may not always mean. Thus those who receive orders to obey may do so, overtly but keep resentment in their own minds. The back stage performance refers to those situations where we letdown our guard and talk and perform freely. Thus a man may take orders from his boss and be deferential to him overtly, even praise him to his face. But when at home with his wife, he may let out steam and abuse the boss, and even call him an idiot. Thus performance rituals hide real feelings and antagonisms. At the same time solidarity among equals is sustained by solidarity rituals like sharing meals or helping the other in performance of tasks.

Thus the complexities of organisational structures are conditioned by the struggle for power that may remain subversive but yet spill over occasionally. Thus antagonisms in an office may escalate to an overt defiance of the authority of the boss, or a strike may take place in a factory. The contemporary scholars are more interested in identifying the micro-processes of struggle and management in real life situations. Rather than grouping people into larger classes the micro-process theorists are more interested in more complex and detailed analysis of status groups and people occupying different roles in the competition for resources and power.

Check Your Progress

1) What is the most salient difference between a functional and a conflict approach to study society?

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2) Explain classical conflict theory as a theory of macro-historical process of social transformation.

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3) What is Elite theory? How does it explain conflict?

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4) Discuss the contribution of Ralph Dahrendorf to Conflict theory.

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5) Where is power located in society? Discuss.

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6) What do you understand by the micro-processes of social power? Discuss with suitable examples.

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4.6   LET US SUM UP

In this unit the student has learnt about the theories that focus on organisation of society, upon the allocation of resources and division of power. In all human societies, except may be the very simplest ones, everyone is never equal and while in a small society, people are usually allocated according to given norms, in most other societies, the control and distribution of resources; questions regarding who gets what, and how, are determined by the structure of organisation of the society, that is inevitably stratified. Some scholars are of the opinion that inequality is an inevitable condition of being human while others think that we can overcome it and come to a more equitable and just order. While Pareto belongs to the first kind, Karl Marx, may be cited as an example of the latter.

As we have seen, genesis of conflict theory is usually attributed to the class theory of Karl Marx. But later scholars, while accepting in principle the dialectically opposed forces of contesting groups, debated on the nature of these groups. A reliance on the sole criteria of economy or ownership of property was discarded to recognize many other sources of power in society, such as those based on expertise, knowledge, political maneuvering and other criteria like gender, race and ethnicity.

With the coming in of new age capitalist society, one that differs significantly from what Marx had conceptualised, we have come to the age of the corporate, of public sector enterprises, and of joint stock holding companies where ownership, authority and control may vest in different locations of the organisation. Scholars have varied in their approach to giving primacy to certain kinds of power. While some see it in authority and legitimacy, others are more inclined to view power as the sole property of coercion and ability to make others do as one wishes them to do.

While the classical conflict theories are macro-historical looking towards larger evolutionary kind of social transformations and their causative factors, the more recent trends are towards looking at conflict in terms of its every day appearances. The more recent theoreticians are inclined towards empirical research and identifying the micro-processes of contradiction, conflict and its outcomes in specific locations.

Conflict theorists are not engaged only in the study of conflict but also in its resolution and in the study of social solidarity and the maintenance of social equilibrium. The only difference from functionalists is that they study how equilibrium and continuity are maintained, given the conditions of potential conflict, generated by the inevitable hierarchy, inequality and exploitation that are the normal conditions of all societies, differing only in degree. Thus conflict theorists take conflict as a normal and inherent condition of social relationships as well as organisations. Thus society passes from one state of maintenance of stability to another state by making changes in its organisation. These organizations aim towards minimization or masking of the real conditions of conflict, always present but not necessarily always manifest.

Conflict theory is thus a study of social organisation overall and of social behavior and only differs methodologically in whether the scholars take a macro-historical perspective or a situational empirical one. Conflict theory has been especially useful in study of inequality, stratification and hierarchy, both in their understanding and in the location of their cause. Overall thus conflict theory is applicable to the removal or redressal of such inequalities but the theories are not in themselves political.

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