

PGSO S1 01

Sociological Perspectives and Theories

SEMESTER - I

SOCIOLOGY

PAPER - 01

BLOCK - 1



KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma, Tezpur Central University.
2. Dr. Sanjay Borbora, Tata Institute Of Social Sciences, Guwahati.

Course Co-ordinator : Dola Borkataki, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1	Kritanjali Jaiswal, GIMT, Guwahati
2	Murchana Kaushik, Guwahati
3	Denim Deka, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon
4,5	Dr. Prarthana Barua, Cotton University, Guwahati
6	Pronoti Baglary, JNU, New Delhi
7	Maitrayee Patar, Tezpur Central University

Editorial Team

Content : Dr. Sanjay Borbora, Tata Institute Of Social Sciences, Guwahati.

Language : Dr. Abhigyan Prasad, B.Barooah College, Guwahati

Structure, Format & Graphics : Dola Borkataki, KKHSOU
Murchana Kaushik, KKHSOU

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City Office : Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati-781006; Web: www.kkhsou.in

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SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEORIES
FIRST SEMESTER
BLOCK - 1
DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 1 :	Emergence of Sociology-I Meaning of Theory, Meaning of Sociological theory, Development of Sociological theory in the context of Enlightenment, The Industrial Revolution, Chief Features of Industrial Revolution, Impact of Industrial Revolution on Society	Pages :	7-19
Unit 2 :	Emergence of Sociology-II Introduction, Medieval Social Philosophy, Ancient Social Philosophy, Social Forces Behind the development of Sociology, Some pioneering scholars of Sociology	Pages :	20-34
Unit 3 :	Functionalism Structural Functionalism, Talcott Parson's Systematic View of Society, R.K.Merton's Systematic View of Society, Major Criticism of Structural Functionalism, Neo-functionalism	Pages :	35-47
Unit 4 :	Structuralism Structuralism as metaphysical assumption, Structuralism as a method, A. R Radcliffe Brown's Approach to Structuralism, Levi Strauss's Approach to Structuralism, Critique of Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Structuration	Pages :	48-63
Unit 5 :	Conflict Perspective Georg Simmel's Conflict Perspective, Conflict Functionalism of Lewis Coser, Analytic Conflict Theory of Randall Collins, Dialectic Sociology of Ralf Dahrendorf	Pages :	64-78
Unit 6 :	Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology Symbolic Interactionism, Elements of Symbolic Interactionism and its basic principles, Mead's Approach to Symbolic Interactionism, Blumer's Approach to Symbolic Interactionism Criticism of Symbolic Interactionism, Garfinkel's Approach to Ethnomethodology	Pages :	79-92
Unit 7 :	Phenomenology Phenomenology: Definition and Characteristics, Phenomenology: Key Thinkers, Phenomenology as Method	Pages :	93-104

COURSE INTRODUCTION:

Theoretical Perspectives, as we all know, is the most significant component of any discipline. Keeping this in mind, this course intends to familiarize the learners with some of the important Sociological Perspectives and Theories. In this Course, we will introduce the learners to the theoretical contributions of the founding figures of Sociology and also provide them brief ideas on some of the basic theoretical approaches/perspectives in Sociology.

The course comprises of 15 units. **Unit 1** describes the contribution of enlightenment and industrial revolution to the growth of sociology as a discipline. **Unit 2** discusses the Contributions of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy to the growth of sociology. It also talks in brief about the social forces behind the development of sociology and also about some of its pioneering scholars. **Unit 3** discusses the Functionalist Perspective in Sociology. It explains the approaches provided by different Functionalist Thinkers to study society. **Unit 4** explains the Structuralists approach to understand society by illustrating the works of Radcliffe Brown and Levis Strauss. It also provides the learners basic idea about Post-Structuralism and Structuration. **Unit 5** explains the perspectives of the thinkers belonging to the Conflict School of Thought like Georg Simmel, Lewis Coser, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Randall Collins. **Unit 6** discusses the perspectives usually referred to as micro level perspectives like Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology, which focus on everyday life and actions of people. **Unit 7** Similar to Unit 6, this unit also talks about another such perspective i.e Phenomenology. **Unit 8** talks about the contributions of Emile Durkheim as one of the founding fathers of sociology. **Unit 9** discusses the contribution of Max Weber to Sociological Theories. **Unit 10** explains the theories of Karl Marx. **Unit 11** discusses the contribution of the thinkers belonging to Frankfurt School of Thought to Sociology. **Unit 12** introduces the learners to some of the important theories and concepts propounded by Antonio Gramsci. **Unit 13** discusses about the important concepts of Louis Althusser. **Unit 14** discusses the ideas propounded by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. **Unit 15** explains some of the important concepts provided by Pierre Bourdieu.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION:

This is the first block of the paper titled 'Sociological Perspectives and Theories' offered in the MA 1st Semester Sociology programme of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. This block intends to provide the learners a basic understanding regarding the different perspectives and theories of sociology. In this direction Unit 1 describes the contribution of enlightenment and industrial revolution to the emergence of the discipline. Unit 2 discusses the ancient and medieval philosophy and the ideas forwarded by some of the pioneering scholars Unit 3 intends to explain the functionalist approach to understanding society. Unit 4 will discuss the perspective forwarded by the Structuralists thinkers to analyse society Unit 5 discusses the ideas and viewpoints of the thinkers belonging to the Conflict School of Thought. Unit 6 discusses the contributions of G.H Mead and Herbert Blumer who were the pioneers of Symbolic Interactionist perspective. It also discusses Harold Garfinkel's approach to Ethnomethodology Unit 7 explains the Phenomenological perspective of understanding society by illustrating the concepts and ideas of Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz.

In order to make the text more interesting and informative, a section called LET US KNOW has been provided in all the units. This section try to provide some additional information regarding the content of the unit. Further, in order to enable the learners to continuously check their progress regarding the content, some questions has been put at the end of various sections of a unit with the heading CHECK YOUR PROGRESS. The answers to the questions of CHECK YOUR PROGRESS section has been provided at the end of each unit. In the end of each unit few Model Question of long and short type is provided in order to provide an idea of the 'question pattern' to be expected in the examinations by the learners.

UNIT 1: EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES I

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Learning objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Meaning of Theory
- 1.4 Meaning of Sociological theory
- 1.5 Development of sociological theory in the context of enlightenment.
 - 1.5.1 The Enlightenment
- 1.6 The Industrial Revolution
 - 1.6.1 Chief Features of Industrial Revolution
 - 1.6.2 Impact of Industrial Revolution on Society
- 1.7 Let Us Sum up
- 1.8 Further Reading
- 1.9 Answers to Check your Progress
- 1.10 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the meaning of theory
- explain the aspects of sociological theory
- discuss the development of sociological theory
- describe the enlightenment
- describe the industrial revolution and its impact on society.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

We begin this course firstly with the discussion on emergence of Sociological theories where we shall try to address how the enlightenment and industrial revolution contributed to the emergence of sociology as a discipline. But before going to that, we shall first try to understand the meaning of theory and what is meant by sociological theory. From these

basic questions, we will go on to examine the importance of theory to sociology as a discipline and, importantly, how sociological theories have developed and relate to the work that they do in describing, defining and explaining the social and cultural worlds that we live in. We know that, sociology emerged as a separate academic discipline in the nineteenth century but sociological thought has its roots in much earlier periods. New ways of thinking about societies began to emerge during the Enlightenment period. A new, critical approach to intellectual inquiry developed which provided the foundations for the development of specific scientific approaches to the understanding of social processes. In this unit, we shall look specifically at the Enlightenment and its development and industrial revolution in the early nineteenth century and how they have paved the way for development of Sociology as a separate discipline.

1.3 MEANING OF THEORY

A theory is a set of relationship between two or more concepts. In other words, a theory is the description of why or how a phenomenon occurs. It is a set of inter-related concepts and ideas which have been scientifically proved and combined to clarify, and expand our understanding of people, their behaviours, and their societies. Without theory, science would be fruitless.

Theories are always abstract and not content or topic specific. Theories can be modifying in the extent to which they have been conceptually developed and empirically proved; however, “validity” is an important feature of a theory. As Stephen Turner has noted in his chapter on “Theory Development,” social science theories are better understood as models that work in a limited range of settings, rather than laws of science which hold and apply universally.

Theory is very important because it makes generalisations about observations and consists of an interrelated, coherent set of ideas and models. Typically, theories are both descriptive and explanatory. That is, a theory should have the capacity to describe a set of observed phenomena and to explain their occurrence, usually causally.

1.4 MEANING OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Sociological theory is a set of assumptions, assertions, and propositions, organized in the form of an explanation or interpretation, of the nature, form, or content of social action.

Sociological theory is closely related to other forms of social theory. As we will see, sociology as an academic discipline emerged in the later part of the nineteenth century. From the beginning, it attempted to define itself against other forms of explanation, including other types of social theory. However, as we will see throughout this course, sociological theory has been and continues to be influenced by the numerous strands of thought in other social and human sciences. It responds, as it always has done, to profound, on-going transformations in the social, political and economic arrangements of the world.

Sociology as a discipline emerged out of a series of debates that began during the period of the Enlightenment between philosophers, scientists and other intellectuals about the origins and nature of human societies. The important thing for us to grasp here is that sociological thinking emerged out of a series of debates. Questions began to be asked during the period of the Enlightenment about what societies are and how they function; about the relationship between individuals and societies, and about social change. However, these questions did not immediately lead to a single set of conclusions. Rather, different perspectives and different ideas emerged in response to these questions and these were often vigorously debated between people holding competing views. This remains the case today and it is important to grasp this point as it allows us to recognise that the systematic attempt to answer complex questions is bound to lead to different solutions, in other words to different theories of what societies are and how they work.

1.5 DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

To understand the root of emergence of sociological theory we must know the relationship between society and ideas. There has always been a

link and a connection between the social conditions of a period and the ideas which arise from and become dominant in that period. The intellectual forces are the important factors that played a central role in shaping sociological theory. Hence we begin with the enlightenment and its influences on the development of sociological theory.

1.5.1 The Enlightenment

Enlightenment was a philosophical movement that took place primarily in Europe and, later, in North America, during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It was a period of remarkable intellectual development and change in philosophical thought. The fundamental features of the Enlightenment include the rise of certain concepts such as **scientific method, reason and liberty**. It was the era when some of the traditional ideas and beliefs related to social life were overthrown and replaced. The most prominent thinkers associated with the Enlightenment were the French philosophers Charles Montesquieu (1689 – 1755) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778). The Enlightenment is the most appropriate form of departure in the origins of sociological theories. It brings the opportunity if one is interested in the study of origins of the sociological theory, for various reasons.

Firstly, the thinkers of enlightenment gave more emphasis on **scientific approach** by using the methods of the natural sciences. They deliberately applied scientific principles to analyse and study the human beings, their nature and society. Moreover, the Enlightenment thinkers wanted their ideas to be derived from the real world and wanted them to be useful to the social world, especially in the critical analysis.

Secondly, the thinkers of enlightenment justified **reason** as a measure to judge social institutions. They believed that human beings are typically rational and this rationality can lead them to freedom of thought and action. Once the human beings understood how the social world worked, the Enlightenment thinkers could work for the creation of a better and more rational world.

Thirdly, with an emphasis on reason, the Enlightenment philosophers were inclined towards liberty and rejected beliefs in traditional authority. When these thinkers studied traditional systems and value institutions, they often found them to be irrational, that is, contrary to human nature and an obstacle to human growth and development. The mission of the thinkers of Enlightenment was to overcome these irrational systems.

Apart from all these, Enlightenment thinking was based on certain principles. According to Hamilton, Enlightenment thinking took place within a broad paradigm in which certain basic principles were accepted. A paradigm is a set of interconnected ideas, values, principles and facts within which coherent theories (attempts to describe and to explain phenomena) are developed. Hamilton argues that key aspects of the Enlightenment paradigm included:

- **Reason:** the fundamental importance of reason and rationality as ways of organising knowledge were stressed.
- **Empiricism:** this is the idea that all thought and knowledge about the natural and social world is based on what we can apprehend through our senses. Much Enlightenment thought relied upon using both rational and empirical methods.
- **Science:** this is the idea that the only way to expand human knowledge is through those methods (experimental, etc.) devised during the 'scientific revolution' of the seventeenth century.
- **Universalism:** the idea that reason and science are applicable in all circumstances and that they can provide explanations for all phenomena in all circumstances. Science in particular was thought to uncover universal laws.
- **Progress:** this is a key idea of the Enlightenment. Here, it was believed that human beings could improve their natural and social conditions through the application of reason and of science. The result would be an ever-increasing level of happiness and well-being.
- **Individualism:** the idea that the individual is paramount and that his or her individual reason cannot be subject to a higher (possibly irrational) authority (such as the Church) or traditional knowledge.

- **Toleration:** the idea that all human beings are essentially the same and that the beliefs of other cultures or 'races' are not necessarily inferior to those of European Christianity.
- **Freedom:** opposition to the traditional constraints on belief, expression, trade, social interaction and so forth.
- **Secularism:** another key aspect of Enlightenment thought, this is opposition to traditional religious knowledge and to metaphysical speculation.
- **Anti-clericalism:** opposition to the Church, organised religion, superstition and religious persecution.
- **Enthusiasm for technological and medical progress:** an enormous enthusiasm for scientific discovery and its practical application in the fields of technology and medicine.
- **A desire for political change and reform:** Enlightenment thinkers were not democrats, but they wished to see constitutional and legal reforms in the states in which they lived.
- **A belief in the pre-eminence of empirical, materialist knowledge:** a desire to uncover the real reasons for the ways that societies operate; the model used was derived from the natural sciences.

It is clear from the above that during the Enlightenment period, there was a drastic change in the ways of thinking about the world or society. The new philosophies of the enlightenment thinkers established the human being at the centre of the universe, and rationality or logic as the central features of human being. The ability to think rationally and critically transformed the human being into the inventor and the user of all knowledge. Moreover, the thinkers of Enlightenment were influenced by two intellectual currents – the prevailing philosophy and science. In other words, they tried to combine empirical research with reason and science was their primary model. Hence, we see the emergence of the application of the scientific method. This new way of thinking which emerged during enlightenment period contributed immensely to the Sociological body of knowledge. It was since the period of enlightenment that several

thinkers began to study society and social phenomena scientifically and developed theories and concepts which forms the core of Sociology.

1.6 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Industrial Revolution began in England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It brought tremendous changes in the life of people. One of the major aspects of Industrial Revolution was the systematic application of science and technology to industrial production, particularly the invention of new machines. There were a number of changes that took place in the production system which brought about great changes in the social and economic life of the people first in England, then in other countries of Europe and later in other continents.

During Industrial Revolution, new tools, machines and techniques were invented which could produce goods on a large-scale and gave rise to the factory system and mass manufacture of goods. The factories were set up in urban areas and they were filled by the workers who migrated from the rural areas and came to the cities in search of work. Hence, a new change in the structure of economy from feudal to capitalist system of production developed. A class of capitalists emerged which controlled the mode of production in factory system.

There were some outstanding mechanical inventions that took place during the phase of Industrial Revolution. For example, James Hargreaves made '**spinning jenny**' in 1764, and Richard Arkwright introduced '**water-frame**' in 1768. Thereafter, some other inventions came in quick succession such as '**mule spinner**' by Crompton and '**power-loom**' by Cartwright. The invention of '**steam engine**' also enabled people to drive the machine by power. Thus, all these along with some other inventions contributed to the industrial development of European society.

1.6.1 Chief Features of Industrial Revolution

The chief features of Industrial Revolution may be summed up as follows:

- A series of mechanical inventions were made by the English scientists.
- The factories started to produce goods with the help of machines run by mechanical power such as steam, oil and electricity.
- The setting up of factory required huge amount of capital which gave birth to two classes in industry, namely, capitalist and labour.
- Mass scale of production and standardisation of goods could be possible by the use of newly invented machines.
- The factory system provided employment to a large number of people which also gave rise to some labour problems.

1.6.2 Impact of Industrial Revolution

With changes in the form of economy, society had confronted certain new and radical changes. A complex and new form of capitalism had emerged. Hence, several emerging economic institutions such as bank, insurance companies, and finance corporations came into being and a new class of workers, managers and capitalists emerged in society. Moreover, due to Industrial Revolution society had seen several changes, which include:

- **Economic Changes**

Industrial Revolution brought about the following economic changes:

- The economy transformed from agricultural to industrial and machines replaced people in methods of production.
- It led to the rise of industrial capitalism under which there were two classes of people, namely, capitalist and workers.
- As factory became the centre of production, large employment could be possible.
- The women and the children also got involved as labourers in the production system.
- Workers became much conscious to protect their rights and interests which gave birth to the concept of *trade union*.
- It brought a positive impact on the standard of living of the people because factories produced better quality goods at cheaper rates for the consumption of the people.

- **Social Changes**

- It led to the migration from villages to towns which caused the expansion of cities and urbanisation. Thus, certain social problems increased such as migration, housing problems, poor sanitation, slums etc.
- Two new classes arose, namely, capitalist and working class due to the new industrial economy i.e. capitalism also caused a huge gap between the rich and the poor.
- The concept of Colonialism had begun and started to exploit the poor and under developed countries.
- The workers were paid lower wages and were forced to work under certain unfavourable working conditions. They were even forced to work for long hours.
- The structure of the family had changed from joint family to nuclear family. People's bond with the village, land and family was broken. This led to the rise of individualism.

➤ **Political Changes**

- The developed western countries like France, Germany, England, Italy, Portugal etc., started to rule all over the world and dominated politically, economically, and socially.
- Colonialism was established to search raw materials and new markets and it changed the world's political structure.
- Some capitalist nations became imperialist nations, extending their rule over other countries or territories, which led directly to World War I and World War II.
- A laissez-faire policy or free market economy took the place of mercantilism where the government did not have any interference.

During the era of Industrial Revolution, the working class in the new industrial society was living in very poor and unhygienic conditions. The rise of population led to increase in the no of cities and urban areas where the socio-economic disparities were very high; the workers were involved in repetitive and boring work, where they could not enjoy their work (*Alienation of Work*, in Marxist term). Moreover, the conservative and radical thinkers

were also influenced by these changes. The conservative thinkers feared that such conditions would lead to social disorder whereas the radical thinkers like Engels felt that such condition would bring a new social transformation. Though the different values of judgement were found the social thinkers of that period agreed that the Industrial Revolution had epoch-making impact on society.

Thus we may conclude by saying that the changes brought by industrial revolution arrested the interest of the social thinkers and motivated them to examine and analyse these changes in a scientific way. This in turn greatly contributed to the growth of sociology as a discipline.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is theory?

Q2: What is sociological theory?

Q3: What do you mean by enlightenment?

Q4: What are the fundamental features of enlightenment?

Q5: Where and when did Industrial Revolution first take place?

Q6: What were the major inventions of Industrial Revolution?



1.7 LET US SUM UP

- The development of theories in sociology has been going on since the earliest times and it still continues. The enlightenment and the industrial revolution had a great influence on the development of sociological theory.
- Sociological theory emerges from a system of thinking that link concepts, often new concepts, with evidence or data to create a broader understanding and explanation of the society.
- The Enlightenment period began in the early years of the eighteenth century with the emergence of European intellectuals. During this period a new framework of ideas about human beings and their societies was developed in the work of a wide variety of thinkers.
- The Enlightenment is also known as “Intellectual Movement” whose purpose was to alter and modify society with advanced knowledge. It promoted science and intellectual interchange and opposed superstition. They believed that human reason could be used to beat ignorance, superstition, and coercion and to build a better society.
- The era of Enlightenment was also known as the “Rise of Age of Reason” where religion was challenged by science and which aimed to reform society with scientific knowledge and logical thinking.
- Industrial Revolution took place in England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and later spread to other countries of the world. It is the era where the use of science and technology could be seen. During this period, many changes took place in industrial system.
- Industrial Revolution led to the transformation of feudal society into industrial society. The emphasis was given on large scale production because of increasing demand which also brought urbanisation and industrialisation.

- Urbanisation and industrialisation brought a new economic structure i.e. **Capitalism** where there were two classes namely, the capitalist and the working class. The capitalist class owned the mode of production. Thus, it led to the huge gap between the rich and poor.
- The conservative and radical thinkers were also influenced by these changes. The conservative thinkers thought these changes would bring social disorder in the society whereas the radical thinkers welcomed these changes for social reformation.

Thus the changes brought by industrial revolution provoked different thinkers and scholars to scientifically examine and analyse these changes and its impact in society. This in turn contributed immensely to the Sociological body of knowledge and growth of Sociology.



1.8 FURTHER READING

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- 6) Zeitlin ,Irving M. (2009). *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory*. New Delhi.Pearson College Division.

1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Theory is a set of inter-related concepts and ideas which have been scientifically proved and combined to glorify, enlarge, clarify, and expand our understanding of people, their behaviours, and their societies.

Ans to Q No 2: Sociological theory is a set of assumptions, assertions, and propositions, organized in the form of an explanation or interpretation, of the nature, form, or content of social action.

Ans to Q No 3: The Enlightenment was a period of remarkable intellectual development and change in philosophical thought, a number of ideas and beliefs, some of which were related to social life were overthrown and replaced during the Enlightenment.

Ans to Q No 4: **Scientific method, reason and liberty** are the fundamental features of enlightenment.

Ans to Q No 5: The Industrial Revolution took place in England during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Ans to Q No 6: The major inventions of Industrial Revolution were spinning jenny in 1764, water-frame in 1768, mulespinner, power-loom, steam engine etc.



1.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: Why is theory necessary for sociology?

Q2: What is Industrial Revolution?

Q3: What are the key features of Enlightenment?

Q4: What were the principles of Enlightenment?

B) Long Questions (Answer each question about 300-500 words)

Q1: Explain the influence of Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution on society.

Q2: What are the chief features of Industrial Revolution?

Q3: Discuss the impact of Industrial Revolution on society.

Q4: Explain how Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution are responsible for the development of sociological theory?

Q5: Discuss the political and social changes brought by industrial revolution.

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UNIT 2: EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY-II

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.3 Ancient Social Philosophy
- 2.4 Medieval Social Philosophy
- 2.5 Social Forces Behind the development of Sociology
- 2.6 Some pioneering scholars of Sociology
 - 2.6.1 Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brede et de Montesquieu
 - 2.6.2 Jean Jacques Rousseau
 - 2.6.3 Joseph-Marie, comte de Maistre
 - 2.6.4 Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald
 - 2.6.5 Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon
 - 2.6.6 August Comte
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Further Reading
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 2.10 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the ancient social philosophy and medieval social philosophy
- explain the social forces behind the emergence of Sociology
- discuss the theories and works of some noted sociologists.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

The development of Sociology as a discipline is a recent phenomenon, dating back to the 19th century. The historical background that predates the development of Sociology is characterized by social,

political, cultural and economic dynamics, which the unit has tried to emphasize. Sociology was born amidst and as a consequence of the changing social order of Europe, particularly France, in order to comprehend the dynamics of the emerging society, polity and economy, and their inter-relations in those times. Therefore, it was inevitable that Sociology was guided by principles of the emerging modern society like reason, logic, scientific temperament, etc. The early sociological theories, thoughts and approaches can be comprehended by understanding some significant scholars of the discipline who have contributed to the birth and growth of the discipline. However, here it must be noted that modern sociological thought was predated by the intellectual and philosophical thoughts of the ancient and the medieval periods which were different from that of the modern era. Therefore, it is important to know these philosophies before engaging in Sociology and its emergence.

In the previous unit we have discussed about the influence of enlightenment and industrial revolution in the emergence of sociology. In this unit we shall discuss the importance of social philosophy of ancient and medieval periods. We shall also discuss about some of the pioneering scholars of sociology.

2.3 ANCIENT SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Ancient social philosophy pertains to the period before the Roman empire ended. It encompasses a large array of philosophical discourses – Greek philosophy and Roman philosophy in the West; Chinese philosophy, which includes Yin-Yang philosophy, Confucianism, Taoism; Indian philosophy, which caters to the Vedas and Upanishads, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain philosophies; and Iranian philosophy, which predominantly includes Zoroastrian thought. In addition to these, ancient philosophy also includes Roman philosophy and Hellenistic philosophy.

Ancient philosophies are characterized by adherence to religious traditions, and are recognized as being of conservative in nature. The development of the western ancient philosophy is largely credited to Plato, Socrates and Aristotle.

There are some general traits which characterize the ancient philosophical thought. As mentioned above, ancient philosophy consists of a diversity of discourses which root to different intellectual traditions. It hardly needs to be mentioned that not all of those thoughts and discourses are considered to be philosophies. This is because for an intellectual line of thought to be considered as a philosophy it must be based on the tenets of rationality, logic and a systematic thought framework. On the basis of this understanding of philosophy, it can be seen that the mentioned intellectual discourses in the ancient philosophy display distinct approaches to the problems and issues and their engagement with them. The following general traits of ancient philosophy must be comprehended.

Ancient philosophy distinctly differs from modern philosophy, perhaps not so much in terms of their object of study, but a lot in their approaches and the methodologies adopted in their studies. Modern philosophy, unlike ancient philosophy, focuses on specific areas of study guided by defined methodological outlines. Consequently, the presentation of the thoughts in ancient and modern philosophies differ from each other, and hence the methods to deal with the derived understandings also vary. For example, the ancient philosophy of the Greeks was presented in the form of poetic verses, which is unlikely to be seen in the context of modern philosophical writings and presentations.

Further, as mentioned already, ancient philosophy was deeply influenced by religion. In contrast to this, the tendency of modern philosophical works is to separate religion from intellectual works. For example, ancient Indian philosophy has dealt in significant amount with religious ideologies and thoughts like that of Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.

The ancient philosophy that developed in the West was different from that of the East. For example, Indian philosophy has different roots and intellectual base. The Vedas are the basis of Indian philosophical thought which deal with questions regarding the universe, man, laws, nature, etc. The Indian philosophical questions were systematically dealt with by six schools of Philosophy. The six schools are: Nyaya, Visheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta.

2.4 MEDIEVAL SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Medieval philosophy confines to the period after the fall of the Roman empire (5th century) upto Renaissance (16th century). Medieval philosophy began as a result of the process of revisiting the ancient Greco-Roman culture, and at the same time as an attempt to integrate that with the present day secular doctrines.

Medieval philosophy is generally classified into two periods, i.e. after the early Middle ages in the Latin West till the 12th century, and the second period is that of the 12th to 14th century.

- The medieval philosophy is characterized by certain common traits as discussed below. The medieval period and its philosophies have been perceived in two different ways. First, it was seen as a barbaric and dark period. This was the period before the Renaissance, and hence was defined by superstition, discrimination, inequality, disturbed social surroundings, etc.
- Secondly, the philosophical development of this period is seen as being influenced by Christianity. Religion was a predominant factor in the public space in this period. Hence, the church was symbolized as the epitome of law and order, conduct, morality, etc.
- Medieval philosophical thought is featured by a discourse on theology. It addressed aspects like the attribute of the divine, the evil, freedom and freewill, the soul and intellect, etc.
- It is to be noted that despite the perception of the medieval period as being barbaric and non-progressive, the philosophical works of this period were characterized by the use of reason and logic.
- Further, it can be seen that the ancient philosophical thought of Plato and Aristotle were particularly revered in the medieval period. Medieval philosophy is recognized by a systematic reference to the ancient philosophy, its analysis, and an attempt to collaborate it with the more logical and systematic thought process of the former.

2.5 SOCIAL FORCES BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology, as a discipline was developed to address the questions and the issues that the European society faced in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It was during this time that the European society was in a transitory phase from a pre-industrialized to an industrialising society. This transition further gave rise to a variety of changes in the social, political, and economic sectors. The transitory phase in Europe was characterized by chaos, lawlessness, changing rules and regulations, amongst others. On the one hand the society was progressing towards a more rational and outward-looking way of life, on the other hand, the remnants of the recent past, traditions, culture, etc kept hovering. The Industrial Revolution and its relevance in this context have been discussed in detail in the previous unit. Another force that shaped the birth of Sociology is the French Revolution. The French Revolution portrayed the emancipating tendencies of the people of those times, whereby they attempted to liberate the society from the clutches of the so called Dark Age. Hence the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity were propagated as the ideals of the modern day. This further garnered the attention of the thinkers and analysts of the time who sought to comprehend the evolving complexities of the modern society. Thus Sociology was the result of two primary forces- the changing social circumstance, and the intellectual forces which include the enlightenment. The thinkers and scholars of this time devised ways to build a systematic thought approach to comprehend the dynamics and establish a new social order. This process led to the development of Sociology. The following account highlights the social context of the period.

The following are the significant social factors that led to the development of Sociology:

- **Socialism:** Socialism refers to Karl Marx's vision of a socio-economic system where means of production are socially owned, and not identified by individual ownership. The growth of socialism can be seen in two dimensions in the context of Europe. On the one hand socialism gained

prominence because it was seen as a way to counter the rapidly growing capitalism. On the other hand, it was opposed by many. In this context, the ideas of Karl Marx are of particular significance. Marx not only provided some important criticism against the capitalist society, but also argued and anticipated through his studies that the capitalist society can eventually be replaced by the socialist order. This, according to Marx could be reached through a revolution. Unlike Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber were of a contrasting view. While recognizing the problems associated with the capitalist order, they neither sought a revolution, nor the replacement of the capitalist society by a socialist one. Instead, they sought reforms in the prevalent social order.

- **Urbanization:** The late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries witnessed several social changes due to the emergence and growth of the industrial revolution and the consequent large scale industrialization. A significant feature of this period was the rising urban settlements in Europe. A large number of people migrated from rural to urban areas. However, it created several difficulties in terms of occupation accommodation, pollution, diseases, etc. The early sociologists, therefore, were primarily concerned about the process of urbanization, as a significant part of the discipline. It is to be noted that the American school of Sociology was primarily characterized by its emphasis on the urban studies.

- **Feminism:** Some significant social and intellectual discourses were undertaken from the feminist perspective, traceable from the 1630s. However, the rise and healthy growth of the liberal feminist outlook began around the time of the American and the French Revolution. The active form of feminist activities could be witnessed in the period of 1850s with the rise in fight for universal suffrage in America. These played a significant role in the emergence of Sociology. However, the feminist writings in the discipline of Sociology in the early times of it were only passive in nature. It was confined to some marginalized scholars, both male and female, who were not inducted in the popular mainstream theoretical base of sociological discourses. The prominent scholars like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, who were recognized as sociologists or as important scholars of the discipline

showed a very conservative approach to the feminist works of the time. The present day form of gender discourses that Sociology emphasizes and promotes is only very recent.

- **Religion:** Religion played an important role in the socio political events of the times. Several early sociologists were associated with some religious background or the other. While for some, religion played a significant role in the social and political settings, at the same time some others viewed religion as insignificant. Emile Durkheim wrote a major work on religion called 'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life' (1912). Max Weber in his 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' (1905) discussed in length the role of religion in bringing up capitalism. Karl Marx also discussed religion, however on a different note. He was critical of the role of religion unlike Durkheim and Weber. His views on religion are well summed up by his famous statement: "Religion is the opium of the masses".

- **Science:** Sociology has always sought to establish itself as a scientific discipline. Early sociologists tried to build Sociology on the lines of natural science. The natural sciences were defined and well acknowledged subjects of study. It was in the attempt to design a scientific discipline of Sociology that the pioneering scholars of the discipline sought to define Sociology from a positivist approach. Positivism refers to the ideology that an aspect or a phenomenon could be established only when it has been verified or proved. Likewise, Emile Durkheim wrote his famous work "Suicide" (1897), based on statistical data and mathematical calculations. Similarly, Herbert Spencer argued that the method of study in Sociology is defined by organic analogy. The concept of Organic analogy means that the organization and survival of society is similar to that of a biological being. To further illustrate, just like the different parts of an organism perform different functions in order to maintain the whole of the organism, similarly the various parts of the society perform various functions to maintain the whole society. In the nineteenth century, several attempts were made to make Sociology scientific. For example, Talcott Parsons in his study of the social structure adopted a quantitative approach. Thus Sociology, in its early days was, categorically defined by quantitative measures based on natural sciences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Mention two social forces which contributed to the growth of Sociology

Q.2: Who wrote the book “The Elementary forms of religious life”?

2.6 SOME PIONEERING SCHOLARS OF SOCIOLOGY

In order to attain a clearer understanding of the subject matter of Sociology and its approaches, it is essential to comprehend the theories and scholars of the discipline. The following account highlights some of the significant pioneering scholars of Sociology and their contributions to the subject.

2.6.1 Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brede et de Montesquieu (1689-1755)

Montesquieu was born on 18 January 1689 in France. He belonged to an aristocratic family. He is known to have widely traveled across Europe. He was an important person in the enlightenment, who also built a comparative perspective on the political systems of those times. Montesquieu is regarded as the founder of modern Sociology, and rightly so. He is known to have given a holistic description of society. According to him, society is an interconnected and integrated entity. However, it must be noted that society is not merely an amalgamation of social relations and interactions, but is larger than the integrated whole. Montesquieu argued that society sometimes seems to be chaotic, but in reality society is guided by laws and institutions. He further argues that no society can be based on despotism, coercion, etc in the long run.

Montesquieu introduced Sociology of Law. He further compared and described the laws of different societies and stated that the differences between the laws of different societies exist because of the social and geographical diversities that characterize these societies. He wrote his famous work called “The Spirit of Law” (1748) which discusses law and the forms of government from a generalist perspective.

2.6.2 Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

Rousseau was born on 28 June, 1712 in Geneva. He was an important thinker of the eighteenth century who contributed significantly to the social and political thought in Europe during the time of enlightenment and the French Revolution. One of his famous works is “Social Contract” (1762). Here, Rousseau argues that an orderly and a legitimate state can be built only when its constituent members identify themselves in terms of their interests and objectives with the larger society and when they collectively devote themselves to the community and its wellbeing. Another important work by Rousseau is “Emile” (1762), which is a treatise on education. Further, Rousseau argued that not only is society based on contradictions, but also that society is corrupt by nature. According to him, the corrupt nature of society can be dealt with the help of strict laws of a particular state, which are to be followed by all. Some of his other famous works are “Discourse on the Arts and Sciences” (1750), “Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men” (1754), etc.

2.6.3 Joseph-Marie, comte de Maistre (1753- 1821)

Maistre was born on 1 April, 1753 in France. He is known as an advocate of counter enlightenment. He is therefore known to have been an advocate of hierarchy and monarchy in the society. According to him, monarchy was a divine institution. He strongly opposed the rationalist ideas, and expressed that the root cause

behind the social and political disturbances during and after the French Revolution was the rejection of Christianity by the rationalist thinkers. Some of his works are “Essay on the general Principle of Political Constitutions” (1847), “Letters on the Spanish Inquisition” (1838), etc.

2.6.4 Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald (1754-1840)

Bonald was born on 2 October, 1754 in France. He belonged to the traditionalist or theocratic school. Therefore his works reflect his ideological tenets of conservatism, traditionalism and counter-enlightenment. His works, which largely deal with political and social philosophies, are based on the entity of language and its origins. It is from language, according to Bonald, that the existence and origin of God can be deciphered, which further gives way to the supremacy of the church. Some of his works are “Du Divorce” (1801), “Legislation Primitive” (1802), etc.

2.6.5 Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825)

Saint Simon was born on 17 October, 1760 in France. He is regarded as a utopian sociologist, perhaps because of his approach that perceived society as an organic whole. He is credited for influencing two distinct developments in Sociology: Marxian Socialism and Comtean Positivism. The discourse of Saint Simon is marked by some principle aspects. First, Saint Simon argued that historically human society passes through three stages which are further defined by distinct thought processes. The three stages are: polytheism and slavery, theism and feudalism and positivism and industrialism. Further he argued that scientific positivism would enable the comprehension the principles and laws of social dynamics and social organisation. In the context of social organization, Saint Simon viewed that the modern society should be guided and organized by industrialists and scientists, and not by clerics, lawyers

and bureaucrats. This is because, according to Saint Simon, the latter are parasitic and unproductive. Emphasizing on the importance of the discipline of Sociology, he argued that the crisis that the modern society faced should be solved through the theory of positivism by the sociologists. Some of his works are “L’Industrie” (1816-1817), “Le Politique” (1819), etc.

2.6.6 August Comte (1798-1857)

August Comte was born on 19 January 1798 in France. Comte in his early days of life witnessed the historical, social and political upheavels that were undergoing in France. It was largely because of the socio-political circumstances around him perhaps, that made him ponder into the ideas of men, their relationships and therefore the society at large. In the process of comprehending the social dynamics of the time, he argued that the French society would inevitably be characterized and defined by new principles in the near future. These principles, according to Comte, shall be designed to balance and integrate the various aspects of social life of men.

The emergence of the discipline of Sociology is rooted in the fact that Europe as a society had reached a level of development which was characterized by disorganization, poverty, fear, etc. It was in his attempt to understand the upheaval in Europe, and particularly France, that led Comte to develop the idea of the discipline of Sociology. Comte coined the term Sociology and used it publicly for the first time in his “Positive Philosophy” (Volume 4) He sought to design Sociology as a science, based on the principles of natural science. Hence, Sociology for him was a discipline guided by reason, observation, comparison, and experimentation. According to Comte, such a disciplinary approach would enable us to understand the social dynamics, and most importantly, to comprehend the evolution of the society from one stage to another.

Comte, in order to systematize the scope and subject matter of the discipline, distinguished social life into the following:

- **Static:** It focuses on the conditions of social existence, which are relatively permanent in nature. In other words, static studies the social order.
- **Dynamic:** It studies the dynamic aspects of society, like the ever changing stages of the society. In other words, it studies social change or progress.

Further, Comte argued that the human mind develops and passes through three stages across all societies. These three stages are referred to as the Law of the three stages. The three stages are the following:

- **Theological Stage:** According to Comte, in this stage the human mind perceives that all phenomena are guided by supernatural beings.
- **Metaphysical stage:** In this stage, according to Comte, men tend to comprehend the world in terms of an essence of God.
- **Positive stage:** In this stage, as Comte perceives, men are guided by logic, reason and laws.

Comte, in addition to the evolution of society from one stage to another, also viewed that all the sciences that have been established have also evolved from a simple to a complex stage. According to Comte, the emergence and the level of complexity of the different sciences can be seen in the following order: Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. Sociology developed very late as compared to the other sciences. The reason behind the late emergence of Sociology as a discipline is that Sociology is the most complex of all sciences, as its subject matter i.e. the society is the most complex to study. Thus, Comte states that Sociology is the queen of sciences. Some of his works are “A General View of Positivism” (1856), “System of Positive Polity”, etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3: Mention the stages entailed in August Comte's idea of the Law of three stages.

Q4: Mention some pioneering scholars of the discipline of Sociology.

Several scholars attempted to build and design Sociology as a discipline in their attempt to understand the transforming social order in Europe in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Their contribution to the subject have been significant in terms of their approach, engagement of issues, and the resultant insights into the problems and questions of the time. However, it must be noted that it was only August Comte who not only systematically and formally established Sociology as a discipline of study, but also built its nomenclature. It was since then that Sociology began to be identified as a disciplinary matter which is characterized by a set of defined subject matter, approach, theoretical framework, and methodology.



2.7 LET US SUM UP

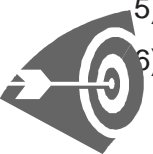
- Ancient social philosophy belongs to the period before the end of the Roman empire. It is characterized by the dominance of religious ideals, and is conservative by nature. Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle were the main scholars of this period.
- Medieval Social philosophy belongs to the period after the fall of the Roman empire upto the period of the Renaissance. The works of this time attempted to integrate the secular ideals of this period with the ancient philosophy.

- Sociology emerged in the eighteenth century in Europe. It was a result of the social, political and economic dynamics of the period.
- Some significant social factors which gave rise to Sociology are: Socialism, Urbanisation, Feminism, Religion and Science.



2.8 FURTHER READING

- 1) Abercrombie, Nicholas and Stephen Hill & Bryan S. Turner. (2000). *The penguin Dictionary of Sociology*; England.
- 2) Borgotta, Edgar F. and Rhonda J. V. Montgomery. (2000). *Encyclopedia of Sociology*; Cengage Learning Publisher.
- 3) Giddens, Anthony. (1997). *Sociology*; Polity Press.
- 4) Haralambos, H and R M Heald. (1997). *Sociology : Themes and Perspectives*. Oxford Publication.
- 5) Ritzer, George. (2010). *Sociological Theory*. McGraw Hill Education.
- 6) Turner, Jonathan H.(2002). *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Wardsworth Publishing Co Inc.



2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Urbanisation, Socialism, Feminism.

Ans to Q No 2: Emile Durkheim.

Ans to Q No 3: Theological, Metaphysical, Positive

Ans to Q No 4: August Comte, Saint Simon.



2.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: List the general characteristics of Ancient social philosophy.

Q2: List the general characteristics of medieval social philosophy.

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

- Q1:** Discuss and differentiate between the ancient-medieval philosophical thought and the modern philosophical thought after the emergence of Sociology.
- Q2:** How did Sociology emerge as a discipline? Highlight the social factors which gave rise to the discipline of Sociology.
- Q3:** Discuss the contribution of some noted early scholars of Sociology to the discipline.

*** **

UNIT 3: FUNCTIONALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Structural Functionalism
 - 3.3.1 Talcott Parson's Systematic View of Society
 - 3.3.2 R.K.Merton's Systematic View of Society
 - 3.3.3 Major Criticism of Structural Functionalism
 - 3.3.4 Neo-functionalism
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Further Reading
- 3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 3.7 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

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

- know about structural functionalism
- understand the systematic view of society in the words of Talcott Parsons and R.K.Merton
- discuss the criticisms against Structural Functionalism
- explain the concept of Neo-Functionalism.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

We are aware of the fact that because we live in a society, we share relations with the ones we come across. Be it institutions like family, religion, kinship or caste group, we tend to develop relations with one another and these institutions keep continuing as we work or interact as various parts of the systems or institutions. In order to maintain coherence and solidarity in the society, functioning of the different or inter-related parts in association with the whole system is essential for the sustenance of the systems. Every individual has variety of functions to perform and this in turn makes the

functioning of the society. In the previous unit we have discussed about the social forces and also about the contribution of different thinkers to the growth of Sociology as a discipline. In this unit, we shall try to understand the theories of functionalism, perspective on the systematic view of society by Talcott Parsons and R.K. Merton, criticisms against structural functionalism and theory of neo-functionalism.

3.3 STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

Structural functionalism is a sociological theory that sees society as a structure of inter-related parts that form a whole system. It addresses the elements like norms, customs, folkways, mores, traditions and institutions as the parts in relation to the whole system of societal functioning. This theory believes that society has evolved like an organism. Herbert Spencer refers to the various parts of the society as 'organs' which work in coordination for the maintenance of the 'body' i.e. the cohesive system or society. For example, If we take family as a system, then the members are the parts with individual elements of working, helping and sharing which would help the functioning of the whole system of family.

In structural functionalism, the terms structural and functional may be used separately. We can study a social structure without its functions. Similarly we could also examine the various functions of society without its structural forms. Structural functionalism may assume various forms but the most dominant form is attributed to Societal Functionalism that aims to explain the role of large-scale social structures, the institutions of society, the inter-relations between these structures and the ways in which individual actions are constrained.

The Functional Theory of Stratification, forwarded by Kinsley Davis and Wilbert Moore, is best regarded as the most significant work in structural-functional theory. According to Davis and Moore, social stratification is both universal as well as a necessity. Stratification, in their view, is a functional necessity and a structure where the system of positions is referred in the stratification system and not the individuals. It is not the individuals who are ranked but the positions that are ranked according to

the degree to which they contribute for the survival of the society. In their view, to be sure that people occupy high-ranking positions, the society should also provide sufficient rewards to the positions so that people will seek to occupy them and work with care. The functional theory of stratification was criticized on grounds that there should be other means of motivating people to work rather than attaching rewards only.

Structural functionalism as a theory has declined over time and it can be reflected in Colomy's (1990s) description of structural functionalism as a theoretical 'tradition'. However, some sociologists appreciated the theory of structural functionalism immensely which is reflected in the words of Robert Nisbet that structural functionalism was "without doubt, the single most significant body of theory in the social sciences in the present century".

3.3.1 Talcott Parson's Systematic View of Society

Talcott Parsons was an American Sociologist. His structural functionalism comprises of four functional imperatives or functions which is called the AGIL system. Using Rocher's definition on function i.e. a function is a complex of activities directed towards meeting a need or needs of the system, Talcott Parsons believes that a system is required to perform the four functions in order to survive. The AGIL system stands for - adaptation (A), goal attainment (G), integration (I) and latency (L).

- **Adaptation:** a system must adapt to the environment and also adapt the environment to its need. It must deal with external situational need or urgency, if any.
- **Goal attainment:** a system must establish or define the goals and also achieve them.
- **Integration:** a system must coordinate and maintain interrelations with the component parts and also administer the relationship among the other functional imperatives (A, G and I).
- **Latency:** it is also called pattern maintenance. A system must ensure that motivations of both the actors or individuals and cultural patterns are managed and renewed.

Now we shall discuss Talcott Parson's **Action System** in terms of the AGIL model. Action is the process which enables individuals to get motivated in pursuing their goals. There are four action systems namely Behavioral Organism, Personality System, Social System and Cultural System.

- The behavioral organism is the action system which handles the function of adaptation thereby adjusting to and changing the external world.

This system is based on the hereditary aspect which stands as the source of energy for the other systems to function and operate. The human body adopts itself to the conditions and learning taking place in the individual's life.

- The personality system is associated with the goal-attainment function which helps individuals to mobilize resources and set goals to achieve them.

This system involves orientation and motivation to actors for action. Need disposition, defined as drives acquired through the process of action and shaped by the social setting is regarded as the most significant unit of the personality system. Actors are impelled to accept or reject objects in the environment or to seek out new objects if the objects present do not suffice or satisfy them.

- The social system performs the integration function by controlling the component parts of the system.

In order to maintain the balance of the social system, socialization and social control are the main mechanisms according to Talcott Parsons. He viewed the social system as a system of interaction but he considered the status-role as the structural component of the social system. An actor or individual is seen in terms of his multiple statuses and roles. Status refers to a structural position within the social system and role is the part or function played by the individual in that position. He was also interested in the other components of the social system

like norms, values and collectivities which helps the social system in operating with other systems and can have a control over disruptive behavior.

- The cultural system performs the latency function where it provides the actors with norms and values thereby inspiring them to act.

This system has the stock of knowledge, ideas and symbols which mediates interaction among the actors and helps them in integrating the values in the personality system and social systems as well. Culture is seen as a patterned and ordered system of symbols which moves from one system to another thereby enhancing the function of socialization and learning among the actors.

Figure 2.3.1.1

Structure of the General Action System

L	I
Cultural System	Social System
Behavioral System	Personality System
A	G

According to Talcott Parsons, the action system works in a hierarchy and the levels of social analysis are integrated in two ways. First, the conditions and energy needed for the higher levels, is provided by the lower levels. Second, the higher levels tend to control those below it in the hierarchy. It is said that the four action systems do not exist in the real world but they are to be regarded as the analytical tools in examining the real world.

Society is considered as a relatively self-sufficient collectivity of the social system where the individuals are able to satisfy their individual and collective needs. There are four types of sub-systems or structures in society which performs various functions in terms of the AGIL schema. The economy as the subsystem with features

of labor, production and allocation, adapts to the needs of the environment. The polity or political system performs the function of goal attainment by organizing actors to use the societal purposes. The fiduciary system (example- norms in school and family) performs the latency function by imparting norms, values to individuals helping them to inculcate it. The societal community (example- the law) performs the integration function by coordinating and collaborating with various parts of the society.

Figure 2.3.1.2

Society, Its Sub-systems and the Functional Imperatives

Fiduciary System	Societal System
Economy	Polity

3.3.2 Robert K. Merton's Systematic View of Society

Robert K. Merton was a student of Talcott Parsons. Unlike Parsons, Merton was inclined towards Marxian theories. Merton found three problematic functional postulates or assumptions of functional analysis of anthropological features put forward by Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown stating that the postulates rely on non-empirical assertions based on abstracts and theoretical systems.

- Functional unity of the society is the first postulate which states that individuals and the whole society must show a high level of integration in the social and cultural beliefs and practices. Merton opposed this view stating that the functionality of beliefs and practices might hold true in a small and primitive society but not in complex societies. For example- Diversity of religious beliefs may not bind all people together and there are bound to be differences.

- The second postulate is universal functionalism which states that 'all standardized social and cultural norms and structures have positive functions'. Merton criticized it saying that in the real world not all structures, belief, custom, idea etc will have positive functions. For example- Loyalism may be highly dysfunctional in a world of corruption.
- Indispensability is the third postulate which argues that all structures and functions are indispensable or essential parts which are functionally necessary for all. Merton is of the view that there will be structures and functions which will play the alternative part in the society. For example- Most people are followers of a religion but some may be followers of some ideologies.

Merton was of the opinion that focal point of the structural functionalist should be on social functions than on the individual motives. Functions, according to Merton, are "those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system". It is to be noted that there will be both positive and negative consequences for social facts or in the process of adjustment. To cope with this, Merton developed an idea of dysfunction which means in addition to a structure and its maintenance, there will also be negative results. For example- The capitalist class or entrepreneurs has the positive result of having employees working according to the wishes of their employers but at the same time there will be negative consequence when the employees will walk out of their position due to job dissatisfaction.

Merton developed the idea of levels of functional analysis which can serve as guide to theory and research and help in analyzing institutions, groups and organizations. He introduced two concepts namely manifest functions and latent functions. Manifest functions are those which are intended. For example- We earn income because we intend to live a life of our wishes. Latent functions are those which are unintended. For example- Some

people draw because they love to which serves as a delight to the eye for the onlookers. Merton was of the opinion that in the functional theory, a structure may be dysfunctional but yet it may continue to exist. For example- atrocities and violence against women is dysfunctional for a society but it functions for the perpetrators of violence on women.

Merton also analyzed the relationship between culture, structure and anomie. Culture is defined by Merton as “that organized set of normative values governing behavior which is common to members of a designated society or a group”. He defined social structure as “ that organized set of social relationships in which members of the society or group are variously implicated” and anomie is said to occur “when there is an acute disjunction between cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of the members of the group to act in accord with them”. It is to be noted that people occupy different positions in the social structure of a society; therefore some people may not be able to act corresponding to normative values. Culture brings in values and behavior in society that which is prevented by the society. Merton is of the view that the lack of correspondence between culture and structure leads to a situation of anomie or no presence of norms which ultimately results in deviant behavior. For example- People usually have a penchant for material culture or success but it is not always achievable for all because one’s position in the social structure will be different and so will be the income level. This might instigate some people to pursue unfair means to get hold of material success thus resulting in deviance from norms and values that a culture provides.

3.3.3 Major Criticism of Structural Functionalism

Like all other theories, structural functionalism is also not free from criticisms. The criticisms can be divided into two parts: (a) Substantive Criticisms and (b) Methodological and Logical Criticisms.

Under 'substantive criticisms', it has been argued that structural functionalism is ahistorical i.e. it does not deal with history. Secondly, it was criticized as structural functionalism was unable to deal with the contemporary process of social change. Lastly, structural functionalism has been attacked for its inability to deal with conflict occurring inside the society. Structural functionalism tends to focus on culture, norms and values and ignores history, change and conflict; therefore it is argued that structural functionalism has a conservative bias. It is also criticized because structural functionalism fails to address a number of important aspects of the society therefore confining itself to a narrow domain.

Under 'methodological and logical criticisms', structural functionalism is said to be vague and an ambiguous theory which deals with more abstract concepts of the social systems rather than its focus on the aspects of the real societies. A second criticism labeled against structural functionalism is on its belief that a single theory or a set of theories could help to make an analysis of the society. But in reality it is difficult to ascertain the aspects of a society with the help of a single theory. Another criticism is whether there is availability of adequate methods to study questions of concern to study a part of the society in relation to other parts or the whole. The last methodological criticism is that a comparative analysis between parts of the social system is difficult in structural functionalism.

3.3.4 NEOFUNCTIONALISM

As by the mid 1960s the importance of structural functionalism declined, a new theory namely Neofunctionalism was undertaken to continue and extend structural functionalism thereby overpowering the difficulties of structural functionalism. Neofunctionalism has been defined by Jeffrey Alexander and Paul Colomy as a "self-critical strand of functional theory that seeks to broaden functionalism's intellectual scope while retaining its

theoretical core". Thus structural functionalism has been seen as a narrow theory by Alexander and Colomy and they aim to make it into a more synthetic theory.

Talcott Parsons was interested in the inter-relationships in spheres of cultural, social and personality system of the social world. But by emphasizing more on the cultural system as the determining domain of the other systems, Parsons has narrowed down his approach thereby giving the chance to neofunctionalism to step up. Alexander argued that structural functionalism had problems like 'anti-individualism', 'antagonism to change', 'idealism' and an 'antiempirical bias', which neofunctionalism needs to overcome. Some basic aspects or orientations of neofunctionalism as pointed out by Alexander are the following:

- Neofunctionalism is an open-ended and pluralistic theory which functions with a descriptive model of society that looks into society as composed of elements, which when interacts with other elements of the society forms a pattern.
- Neofunctionalism, as argued by Alexander, gives a broad sense of attention to action and order, to both rational and expressive action. Unlike structural functionalism which gives attention to macro-level sources of order in society, neofunctionalism devotes attention to both macro and micro order in society.
- Deviance and social control has been recognized as realities within the social system by neofunctionalism. Both the concept of partial and moving equilibrium in the society has been put into focus of neofunctionalism and they see equilibrium as a reference point for functional analysis, not as a descriptive pattern related to the lives of the people.
- The Parsonian concept of personality, culture and social system has been taken into account by neofunctionalism. The insertion of these systems into the society is also to account for tensions which shall call for both change and order.

- The social change which undergoes in the process of differentiation within the system of social, culture and personality is concentrated by neofunctionalism.
- Lastly it has been argued by Alexander that neofunctionalism is committed to the independence of conceptualization and theorizing from other levels of sociological analysis.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Define structural functionalism.

Q2: What does AGIL stand for?

Q3: Write the four action systems.

Q4: State the two divisions of criticism of structural functionalism.



3.4 LET US SUM UP

- Structural functionalism as a theory that studies the various inter-related elements of the society forming the whole system.
- According to Talcott Parsons, for a society to survive, four main functions are to be performed. They are Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration and Latency.
- The action system in terms with the AGIL model is necessary to motivate individuals to pursue the goals. The four action systems are behavioral organism, personality system, social system and cultural system.

- There are the sub-systems in term with the AGIL system which helps in individual needs. They are Economy, Polity, Societal system and Fiduciary System.
- Robert k. Merton in this study of society rejected the functional postulates namely functional unity of the society, universal functionalism and indispensability put forwarded by the anthropologist.
- The relationship between culture, structure and anomie and the changes being brought by these domains has been emphasized by Merton.
- Structural functionalism has been said to be biased which focuses on culture, norms and values but ignores history, change and conflict.
- Neofunctionalism as a theory attempts to make functionalism a broader concept by retaining its theoretical value.



3.5 FURTHER READING

- 1) Ritzer, George, and Goodman, Douglas J. (2003). *Sociological Theory*. Mc Graw-Hill.

3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Structural functionalism is a sociological theory that sees society as a structure of inter-related parts that form a whole system.

Ans to Q No2: AGIL stands for Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration and Latency.

Ans to Q No3: The four action systems are Behavioral system, Personality system, Social system and Cultural system.

Ans to QNo4: Substantive criticism, Methodological and Logical criticism.



3.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: Write about functional theory of stratification.

Q2: Write Rocher's definition on function and explain the AGIL system.

B. Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Explain Robert K. Merton's systematic view of Society.

Q2: Which two persons are associated with neofunctionalism. Explain the basic points argued by Jeffrey Alexander.

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UNIT 4: STRUCTURALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE:

- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Structuralism as metaphysical assumption
- 4.4 Structuralism as a method
- 4.5 A. R Radcliffe Brown's Approach to Structuralism
- 4.6 Levi Strauss's Approach to Structuralism
- 4.7 Critique of Structuralism
- 4.8 Post-structuralism
- 4.9 Structuration
- 4.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.11 Further Reading
- 4.12 Answer to Check Your Progress
- 4.13 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand Structuralism as metaphysical assumption and as a method of analysis
- explain contributions of Levi Strauss towards the development of structuralist approach
- discuss the contributions of Radcliff Brown to Structuralism
- explain the drawbacks of structuralism; emergence of Post-structuralism and Gidden's structuration theory.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Structuralism as one popular intellectual discourse emerged in France during the period 1960s super-ceding the contemporary dominant theories like Marxism, Phenomenology, and Existentialism. We must mention here about Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist of early

twentieth century was the founding father of the method. His work stands out in the development of structural linguistics and ultimately structuralism in various other fields. Structuralists applied structural linguistic concepts to the human sciences. French anthropologist Levi-Strauss has extended Saussure's work on language to anthropological issues like myth in the primitive societies. He has also applied structuralism to all forms of communication. Another variant of structuralism that enjoyed considerable success in France was structuralist Marxism especially the work of Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, and Maurice Godelier. In the previous unit we have discussed about the structural functionalist perspective in sociology, its limitations and also the emergence of neo functionalism. In this unit we will discuss in detailed about the nature of structuralism, another important sociological perspective and contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure. In addition to that a detailed discussion will be made on Radcliffe Browns and Levi Strauss's approach to structuralism.

4.3 STRUCTURALISM AS METAPHYSICAL ASSUMPTION

We know that the word metaphysics refers to an entity which is beyond physics or physical existence. In other words it refers to something which is abstract. And if we look into structuralism it also talks about an underlying structure which we cannot see but which produces a phenomenon and also tries to find out logic. Therefore structuralism is a metaphysical assumption which will become apparent after going through the subsequent discussion on structuralism.

In common parlance the term structuralism is used loosely in sociology to refer to any approach which considers social structure as having priority over social action or society as being prior to individuals. More specifically it refers to a theoretical perspective which became fashionable during the 1960s and the 1970s. It is a method of enquiry or in some formulations a more general philosophy of science which has affinities with realism and which contested the position of positivism and empiricism. It has made its way from linguistic to literary criticism, sociology of literature,

anthropology, social sciences etc. The basic structuralist strategy is to regard language as the model for all reality. Collins maintained that it is not just reality that we see through the lens provided by our words. This would be a subjective kind of realism. Instead the structuralists propose that reality is itself a language, whose underlying structure is our duty to decode. Reality is objective not subjective and some structuralists go so far as to declare they are “anti-humanists” and practitioners of a “ philosophy without a subject”. That is to say reality is text which we may read. Structuralists point out that the underlying structures are beyond the level of the individual, that our individual human consciousness is not the ultimate level of analysis, but is on the level of the empirical “parole” that is a product of deeper structures. Our individual minds are the surface, not the depth. Structuralism warns us against stopping on this superficial level and advocates push to a more fundamental level of structures from which it derives.

The basic idea of this approach is that we can differentiate underlying structures from the often fluctuating and changing appearance of reality. Again for Levi Strauss and semiotics generally these underlying structures are categories of mind, in terms of which we organize the world around us. We have already mentioned that the structuralists applied structural linguistics to human science. To have a clear understanding it is necessary to discuss about structural linguistics. All modern proponents of structuralism owe allegiance to Ferdinand de Saussure. His distinction between *langue* and *parole* is very important. *Langue* is the formal, grammatical system of language. *Parole* is actual speech, the way speakers use language. Saussure viewed *Langue* (*language*) as system of signs , which has structure and the meaning of each sign is produced by the relationship with others. Here the relationships of difference, especially of binary oppositions are important. The meaning of the word black does not come from the intrinsic properties of the word but from the word's relationship with the binary opposite white. The language or the system of sign could be described synchronically. The synchronic approach involves the study of a linguistic system in a particular state without reference to time (a static set of relationships independent of any change that take place over time).

According to Saussure the basic unit of language is a sign which consists of a signifier (a sound image or its graphic equivalent) and a signified (the concept). For example a word consists of the letter G-R-A-P-E functions as a signifier by producing in the mind of the speaker the concept (signified) of a kind of fruit that grows on vine, viz., a grape. According to Saussure the relation between a signifier and a signified is arbitrary, because there is no absolute reason why this particular graphic mark (G-R-A-P-E) should signify the concept grape. There is no natural connection or resemblance between the signifier and the signified. Meanings, the mind and the social world are shaped by the structure of language. Thus, instead of an existential world of people shaping their surroundings, we have a world in which people, as well as other aspects of the social world, are shaped by the structure of language.

Noam Chomsky makes another contribution to structural theory which is of importance in linguistics. He pointed towards the distinction between surface structure and deep structure. A surface structure consists of the collection of words and sounds that we articulate and hear in a sentence. Two sentences may have the same structure at the surface level, yet they have different meanings because their deep structures are different.

From the above discussion we can conclude that structuralism always starts with certain assumptions. It considers the world firstly as a product of ideas, secondly the world as a logical pattern. The structuralists explain structuralism with reference to logic. Lastly it talks about the “the death of a subject”. Subject means an agency, action and person.

4.4 STRUCTURALISM AS A METHOD

The principal feature of the structuralist method is that it takes as its object of investigation a ‘system’, that is, the reciprocal relations among a set of facts, rather than particular facts considered in isolation. Its basic concepts according to Piaget are those of totality, self-regulation and transformation. In most general sense, the concept of structure involves three key ideas:

- A structure is always a system, composed of elements, with the focus not on the elements themselves, but on the rules that govern their composition.
- The properties of the whole are distinct and not reducible to the properties of the parts.
- The system is self regulating, in that it operates to return to a stable state if its equilibrium is disturbed. Structures are also seen as epigenetic, i.e., their genesis, or origin, is already present in the same manner as the nature of the frog is present in nascent form in the tadpole.

The structuralist revolution deployed holistic analysis that analyzed phenomena in terms of parts and wholes, defining a structure as the interrelation of parts within a common system. Structures are governed by unconscious codes of rules, as when language constituted meaning through a differential set of binary opposites, or when mythologies codified eating and sexual behaviour according to systems of rules and codes. Structural analysis focuses on the underlying rules which organized phenomena into a social system.

Practitioners of structuralism apply the method to different areas. Levi Strauss to myth and kinship, Barthes to literature, advertisements, automobiles, Foucault to history and Althusser to capitalism.

4.5 A. R RADCLIFFE BROWN'S APPROACH TO STRUCTURALISM

Radcliffe-Brown has often been associated with functionalism, and is considered by some to be the founder of structural functionalism. Nonetheless, Radcliffe-Brown vehemently denied being a functionalist. Radcliffe Brown states that in the study of social structure, the concrete reality with which we are concerned is the set of actually existing relations at a given moment of time. These link together certain human beings. Social structure therefore, is to be defined as a continuing arrangement of reasons in relationships defined or controlled by institutions i.e. socially established norms and patterns of behavior.

He regards the study of social structure as the most fundamental part of social anthropology. According to him natural science is the systematic investigation of the structure of the universe which is revealed through our senses. There are certain important separate branches of science, each of which deals with a certain class or kind of structure, the aim being to discover the characteristics of all structures of that kind. For example atomic physics deals with the structure of atoms, chemistry with the structure of molecules, crystallography and colloidal chemistry with the structure of crystals and colloids, and anatomy and physiology with the structures of organisms. He viewed that there is place for a branch of natural science the task of which will be the discovery of the general characteristics of those social structures of which the component units are human beings. For Brown, social anthropology is the 'theoretical natural science of human society'. That means social phenomenon is to be investigated by methods similar to those used in natural and biological sciences.

Social phenomena constitute a distinct class of natural phenomena. They are somehow connected with the existence of social structures, either being implied in or resulting from them. Social structures are just as real as are individual organisms. A complex organism is a collection of living cells and interstitial fluids arranged in a certain structure; and a living cell is similarly a structural arrangement of complex molecules. The physiological and psychological phenomena that we observe in the lives of organisms are not simply the result of the nature of the constituent molecules or atoms of which the organism is built up, but are the result of the structure in which they are united. So also the social phenomena which we observe in any human society are not the immediate result of the nature of individual human beings, but are the result of the social structure by which they are united.

A particular social relation between two persons exists only as part of a wide network of social relations, involving many other persons or in other words we can say that as a person the human being is a complex of social relationships which is the object of investigations or unit of study for sociologist or social anthropologists.

Again it is important to mention here that the word social structure is used in a number of different ways. There are some anthropologists who use the term social structure to refer only to persistent social groups, such as nations, tribes and clans, which retain their continuity, their identity as individual groups, in spite of changes in their membership. Dr. Evans-Pritchard, in his recent admirable book on the Nuer, prefers to use the term social structure in this sense. Certainly the existence of such persistent social groups is an exceedingly important aspect of structure. But Brown finds it more useful to include under the term social structure the following two aspects:

- All social relations of person to person as a part of the social structure. For example, the kinship structure of any society consists of a number of such dyadic relations, as between a father and son, or a mother's brother and his sister's son. In an Australian tribe the whole social structure is based on a network of such relations of person to person, established through genealogical connections.
- The differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role. The differential social positions of men and women, of chiefs and commoners, of employers and employees, are just as much determinants of social relations as belonging to different clans or different nations.

Brown viewed that social structure is the concrete reality which comprised a set of actually existing relations at a given moment of time, which link together certain human beings. Throughout the life of an organism its structure is being constantly renewed; and similarly the social life constantly renews the social structure. Thus the actual relations of persons and groups of persons change from year to year, or even from day to day. New members come into a community.

Social relations are only observed, and can only be described, by reference to the reciprocal behaviour of the persons related. The form of a social structure has therefore to be described by the patterns of behaviour to which individuals and groups conform in their dealings with one another.

These patterns are partially formulated in rules which, in our own society, we distinguish as rules of etiquette, of morals and of law. Brown has made an attempt to define the concept of social structure, rather than taking it for granted.

4.6 LEVI STRAUSS'S APPROACH TO STRUCTURALISM

The origin of the Levi-Strauss' approach is very much linked with Saussure's structural linguistics. He has extended Saussure's work on language to anthropological issues like kinship system and myth in primitive societies. His article '*Social Structure*' is an abstract statement of his theoretical approach. He starts by distinguishing between the level of social relations, the raw material for the model, the social structure which is built up after reality and serves to explain it. He viewed that social structure has nothing to do with reality, but with the models built after it. Levi Strauss' concept of model formation is influenced by structural linguistics. By using Saussurean concepts like *langue* and *parole*, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, code and message etc. he has formulated the concept of model. According to him a model must have the following characteristics:

- It is made up of several elements and a change in one leads to change in all.
- Therefore it is possible for one to predict the reaction of a given model after certain modifications to one or more of its elements.
- Subsidiary models could be possibly derived out of a given model, that is, the same structure occurs in different forms and in different cultures.

Again a social structure is a model because:

- if one part of the social structure is affected, it in turn affects the other parts
- parts of social structure undergo transformation
- social structure makes prediction possible.

We can illustrate Levi-Strauss' concept of 'social structure as a model' by drawing examples from his study of Kinship where he has focused on the similarities between linguistic system and kinship system. The terms used to describe kinship are like phonemes in language and kinship system, like phonemes, are built by the mind at the level of unconscious thought. In kinship system focus is not on the terms as entities but on their relationship within a system, which is structured. Neither the kinship terms nor the phonemes have meaning in themselves. Both acquire meaning only when they are integral part of a system. Levi –Strauss also used the system of binary opposites in kinship like those applied by Saussure in language. He used the atom of kinship to analyze kinship structure in a society. Atom of kinship always consists of four types of relationships a) conjugal b) sibling c) filial d) avuncular. Levi-Strauss viewed that in every society these four types of relationships are either of restraint or of indulgence.

After applying Saussure's Linguistic Structuralism to kinship system, Levi- Strauss made the argument that both phonemic system and kinship system are the product of structure of mind. They are not the product of conscious process. They are the product of the unconscious, logical structure of mind.

4.7 CRITIQUE OF STRUCTURALISM

According to Collins the biggest weakness of structuralism is that it promised more than it could deliver. Levi- Strauss claimed that he would produce a science and would crack the genetic code that underlines human societies but did not succeed. The Structuralist thinkers have borrowed linguistic theory as an analogy, but they have neither kept up with the technical advances in linguistics itself, nor have they contributed toward unifying sociological principles with those of linguistics. Thirdly Levi-Strauss was proposing that each society had its own particular code, underlying all items of its structure. This seems to be an extension of his theory of kinship, which was based on separating out different forms of kinship systems. But Levi-Strauss was never able to show that such a code existed for each society. Levi-Strauss and other structuralists, although drawing upon

Saussure for a general model, never tried to incorporate language itself to their analysis. They analyzed myth, kinship system etc. but did not look directly at the structure of the languages. Giddens also criticized Levi-Strauss for ignoring human agency or the capacity of people to reflect, monitor, define and decide.

4.8 POST-STRUCTURALISM

As structuralism grew within sociology, a movement was developing in France during the 1960s critiquing structuralism, which is known as post structuralism. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes were the major proponents of post-structuralism. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* :

post-structuralism's prime achievement has been to rediscover and extend the radical analytical possibilities inherent in Saussure's theory of language as a signifiatory rather than representational phenomenon.

Post-structuralism accepts the importance of structure but it goes beyond the structure to cover a wide range of concerns. It is often seen as forerunner of postmodern theory and even it is difficult to draw the clear line between these two thoughts. Because of this reason post-structuralists are often seen as postmodernists. But the major difference between post-structuralism and postmodernism is that post-structuralism is more abstract and philosophical than postmodernism. Post-structuralists firmly reject the notion that there is a steady structure to texts, particularly the theory of binary opposition and it has put forward the concept of deconstruction.

According to Derrida the meaning of a text can be plural and unstable rather than fixed and a rigid structure. All texts actually exhibit difference thereby allowing multiple interpretations. The meaning or truth is determined by the limitations of the discipline, which supposedly discovers and describe them. He further argued that meanings are never absolute and settled. It is actually conditioned by specific historical and social knowledge.

Foucault also came to be seen as one important representative of the post-structuralist movement. He agreed that language and society were

shaped by the rule governed systems, but he disagreed with the structuralists on two points. Because he did not think that there were definite underlying structures that could explain the human condition and secondly he thought it was impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation objectively. Foucault's work illustrates another difference between post-structuralism and structuralism. Structuralism is mostly influenced by linguistics. But Foucault has put in a variety of theoretical inputs. Even though he gives importance to many social institutions, for him micro-politics of power is the most important aspect of social structure. Foucault examines social institutions and their associated discourses by taking power relations as the major perspective.

4.9 STRUCTURATION

The theory of structuration was proposed by Anthony Giddens in his work *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. This theory is actually an attempt to resolve the theoretical dichotomies of social structures like agent/structure, micro/macro perspective etc. Rather than focussing on individual actors or societal totality, it focuses on social practices, order across space and time.

This theory intends to communicate the duality of structure i.e it avoids extremes of structural or agent determinism. It is social structure which makes social action possible and simultaneously social action creates social structure i.e social structure is used by active agents and using the properties of social structure they reproduce this structure. According to Giddens structures are rules and resources that actors use in interaction contexts. Rules are generalized procedures that actors understand and use in various circumstances. These rules are frequently used in conversations, interaction rituals, and daily routines of individuals. They are informal and are weakly sanctioned through inter personal technique. Resources are facilities that actors use to get things done. Rules and resources can be transformed into many different patterns and profiles. Resources can be mobilized in different ways to perform activities and achieve ends.

Further Giddens viewed that social system could be understood by its structure, modality and interaction. We have already discussed about the structure. Modality of a structural system is the means through which structures are translated into actions and interaction is the activity instantiated by the agent acting within the social system. He also identifies three type of structures in a social system. These are accordingly: signification, legitimation and domination. Signification produces meaning through organized webs of language, legitimation produces moral order and domination produces power, originating from control of resources.

The synthesis of diverse theoretical traditions is the most important element of Giddens's theoretical effort. His theory is essentially concerned with the way in which interaction becomes "deeply sedimented in time and space. However, the theory of structuration is not free from criticism. Turner viewed that while Giddens' writing is crisp, and eloquent, it is also vague. There is a great deal of jargon, metaphor, and just plain impression that are difficult to understand.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What do you understand by structure?

Q2: Distinguish between langue and parole.

Q3: What is the basic unit of language?

Q4: Define rules and resources.

Q5: What are the three different types of structure in a social system according to Giddens?



4.10 LET US SUM UP

- Structuralism as one popular intellectual discourse emerged in France during the 1960s. The term structuralism is used loosely in sociology to refer to any approach which considers social structure as having priority over social action or society as prior to individuals.
- Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist of early twentieth century was the founding father of the method.
- Structuralists point out that the underlying structures are beyond the level of the individual, that our individual human consciousness is not the ultimate level of analysis, but is on the level of the empirical “parole” that is a product of deeper structures. Our individual minds are on the surface, not the depth.
- Structuralism warns us against stopping on this superficial and advocates a push to a more fundamental level of structures from which it derives.
- The principal feature of the structuralist method is that it takes as its object of investigation a ‘system’, that is, the reciprocal relations among a set of facts, rather than particular facts considered in isolation.
- Radcliffe Brown viewed that social structure is the concrete reality which comprised of a set of actually existing relations at a given moment of time, which link together certain human beings. Throughout the life of an organism its structure is being constantly renewed; and similarly the social life constantly renews the social structure.
- Levi- Strauss applied Saussure’s Linguistic structuralism to kinship system and argued that both phonemic system and kinship system

are the product of structure of mind. They are not the product of conscious process. They are the product of the unconscious, logical structure of mind.

- According to Collins the biggest weakness of structuralism is that it promised more than it could deliver.
- Post-structuralism accepts the importance of structure but it goes beyond the structure to cover a wide range of concerns. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes were the major proponents of post-structuralism.
- The major difference between post-structuralism and postmodernism is that post-structuralism is more abstract and philosophical than postmodernism. Post-structuralists firmly reject the notion that there is a steady structure to texts, particularly the theory of binary opposition and it has put forward the concept of deconstruction.
- The theory of structuration was proposed by Anthony Giddens with the help of which he made an attempt to resolve the theoretical dichotomies of social structure like agent/structure, micro/macro perspective etc.
- It avoids extremes of structural or agent determinism. It is social structure which makes social action possible and simultaneously social action creates social structure.



4.11 FURTHER READING

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4. 12 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: A structure is always a system, composed of elements, with the focus not on the elements themselves but on the rules that

govern their composition. The properties of the whole are distinct and not reducible to the properties of the parts.

Ans to Q No 2: Ferdinand de Saussure has made distinction between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is the formal, grammatical system of language. *Parole* is actual speech, the way speakers use language.

Ans to Q No 3: The basic unit of language is sign which consists of signifier and signified.

Ans to Q No 4: Rules are generalized procedures that actors understand and use in various circumstances. Resources are facilities that actors used to get things done.

Ans to Q No 5: Signification, Legitimation and Domination.



4.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: Define Post-structuralism.

Q2: Mention two important characteristics of a model as put forth by Levi Strauss.

Q3: Why social structure can be considered as model?

B) Long questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Discuss about Saussure's contribution to structural linguistics.

Q2: Critically discuss the theory of Structuralism.

Q3: What do you understand by duality of structure? Discuss.

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UNIT 5: CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Georg Simmel's Conflict Perspective
- 5.4 Conflict Functionalism of Lewis Coser
- 5.5 Dialectic Sociology of Ralf Dahrendorf
- 5.6 Analytic Conflict Theory of Randall Collins
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Further Reading
- 5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 5.10 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- learn about the conflict perspective to understand society
- explain the idea of conflict as advocated by Georg Simmel
- discuss Lewis Coser's perspective on Conflict
- describe Ralf Dahrendorf's and Randall Collin's idea on conflict.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Conflict theory emerged as the primary alternative to functionalism. It is important to mention that Functionalism is a dominant mode of sociological analysis but conflict theory is still in its infancy stage. Conflict theory began as a development from the Marxian tradition. The conflict theory generally views society as a system of social structures and relationships that are shaped mainly by economic forces. Conflict theorists assume that social life revolves around the economic interest of the wealthy and that these people use their economic power to coerce others to accept their view of the society. Secondly, as there is power differential among individuals of social classes, hostility, resentment etc. are constant elements of society for which conflict is inevitable.

There are two distinct traditions of conflict theory in the classical works. The power relation tradition of political philosophy and the tradition of competitive struggle. The sociological theory of conflict is a combination of both these traditions. C. Wright Mills, Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, Herbert Marcuse, Randall Collins, Georg Simmel and Andre Gunder Frank are among the prominent conflict theorists of contemporary times. Sociologists, have identified two categories of conflict: Exogenous conflict and endogenous conflict. Conflict theory is perhaps the prime area in sociological theory where general theoretical principles are fairly well supported by empirical research. In the previous unit we have discussed about the Structuralist Approach to understand society. In this unit we shall try to understand the perspectives put forward by different scholars belonging to the Conflict School of Thought.

5.3 GEORG SIMMEL'S CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

The modern conflict theory actually began with the work of Georg Simmel and was revised by Lewis Coser. Simmel was interested in the 'web of conflict' or the cross cutting allegiances that can both bind a society together and also create antagonism and confrontation. He focused mainly on the positive function of conflict. He views conflict as a variable that manifests different states of intensity or violence. The polar ends of this variable are competition and fight. Competition is a form of interaction in which opposing parties seek to accomplish the same goals within the framework of socially approved rules. On the other hand, fight denotes the less regulated and more direct combative activities of parties against each other.

According to Simmel, conflict is not opposite to social order rather, it is an intense form of interaction. Very often it brings people more close and together than normal social order. For example conflict with outside group enhances the unity of the in group by strengthening group sentiment, loyalty and conformity to norms. He viewed that a particular conflict situation may be ruinous for the individual, but may be advantageous to the community as a whole because conflict promotes system integration and adaptation. In addition, conflict between groups is a major determinant of the

development of group organization. The increased level of organization within conflict groups enables them to realize many of their goals without violence and such realization of goals cuts down internal system tension and promotes integration.

Simmel has rejected the notion that conflict is a temporary phase which is eventually transformed to unity, and has insisted that peace and conflict are reciprocally intertwined in historical reality. Sometimes conflict transforms into peace and sometimes peace transforms into conflict.

Simmel has made some suggestions for the execution of conflict. These are as follows:

- Disappearance of the object of conflict.
- Victory, which results from the superiority of one party over the other.
- Compromise, in this case the two parties agree to divide the object of conflict.
- Conciliation.

In addition to these measures Simmel has made some propositions on the functions of conflict for the conflict parties and for the systemic whole in which conflict occurs. His propositions on the functions of conflict for the parties are as follows:

- The more violent are inter group hostilities, the more frequent is conflict among groups, the less likely are group boundaries to disappear.
- The more violent is the conflict, the less integrated is the group, the more likely is despotic centralization of conflict groups.
- The more violent is the conflict, the greater will be their internal solidarity.

Simmel's propositions on the functions of conflict for the whole are as follows:

- The less violent is the conflict between groups of different degree of power in a system, the more likely is the conflict to have integrative consequences for the social whole.
- The more violent and the more prolonged are conflict relations between groups, the more likely is the formation of coalitions among previously unrelated groups in a system.

- The more prolonged is the threat of violent conflict between groups, the more enduring are the coalitions of each of the conflict parties.

5.4 CONFLICT FUNCTIONALISM OF LEWIS COSER

Coser was very much influenced by the work of Simmel for which he has given much attention on conflict aspects of society. He has criticized Parsons's functionalism for not addressing the issue of conflict and also criticized other conflict theorists for overlooking the positive aspects of conflict. His major work on conflict theory, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), is an attempt to develop Simmel's theory of conflict. The conflict theory of Simmel and Coser presents a series of principles by which conflict lead to the integration of society. Both of them tried to show that conflict does not always lead to social change, rather conflict can be the basis of social order. In his work *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), Coser related conflict to the social world and discussed how conflict can lead to social change, and paid close attention to the role of people's emotion in conflict. Coser viewed that although conflict always exists in society, society also consists of degrees of consensus.

Coser defined conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals". According to him conflict often leads to social change, stimulates innovation, and during the time of external and internal threat, it leads to an increase in the centralization of power. In his book he has presented a number of arguments regarding the intensity, duration, causes and functions of conflict.

Combining Simmel's and Marx's ideas, Coser maintained that withdrawal of legitimacy from an existing system of inequality is the critical precondition of conflict. And when the deprivations of subordinates are transformed from absolute to relative, the greater will be their sense of injustice and hence they are more likely to initiate conflict. He has also mentioned some important arguments regarding the intensity or violence of conflict. These are as follows:

- When more groups are engaged in conflict over realistic issues (realistic conflict), the more likely are they to seek compromises over the means to realize their interests and hence less violent is the conflict. Since realistic conflicts center around specific goals, the attainment of those goals is more important than the destruction of the enemy.
- When groups engage more in conflict over nonrealistic issues, the level of emotional excitement and involvement in the conflict is greater, for which the conflict is more violent.

According to Coser violence and conflict are often interlinked and violence performs some important social functions. First is violence as achievement. Causing violence is an achievement for some people and the more violence they cause, the more they achieve in their own minds. Secondly violence often alerts society and its members to underlying problems that need to be corrected.

In addition to all these, most importantly Coser's approach to conflict focused on its various functions. Like Simmel, Coser divided the functions of conflict for i) the respective parties of conflict and ii) the systemic whole in which conflict occurs.

- Coser's propositions regarding the functions of conflict for the respective parties are accordingly :
 - When the conflict is more violent, the boundaries of each respective conflict party are more clear cut.
 - When the conflict is more violent and the conflict parties are more internally differentiated, each conflict party is more likely to centralize its decision making process.
 - When the conflict is more violent, the more it is supposed to affect the welfare of all segments of the conflict parties, and the conflict promotes more structural and ideological solidarity among members of each conflict party.
 - The more violent the conflict is the more conflict leads to the suppression of dissent and deviance within each conflict party as well as forced conformity to norms and values.

- The more the conflict between parties leads to forced conformity, the greater is the accumulation of hostilities, and is internal group conflict is more likely to surface in the long run.
- Coser's propositions regarding the functions of conflict for the social whole are accordingly:
 - The more differentiated and functionally interdependent are the units in a system, the more likely is conflict to be frequent but with low degrees of intensity and violence.
 - The more frequent are conflicts, the less is their intensity, and lower is their level of violence, then the more likely are conflicts in a system to a) increase the level of innovation of system units b) release hostilities before they polarize system units c) promote normative regulation of conflict relations, d) increases awareness of realistic issue e) increases the number of associative coalitions
 - More conflict, promote levels of innovation, release hostilities, normative regulation, awareness of realistic issues and associative coalitions, then greater will be the level of internal social integration of the system, and the greater will be its capacity to adapt to its external environment.

Conflict serves as an important agent in establishing full ego identity, autonomy and differentiation of personality from the outside world. Conflict with other groups increases a group's consciousness and awareness of separateness and establishes boundaries between groups. According to Coser, Conflict allows expression of hostility and the restoration of strained relationship. It leads to the elimination of specific sources of conflict between the parties and enables redressal of grievances through the establishment of new norms or the affirmation of new ones. Social conflict creates boundaries between different groups, which create a strong unity between the individual members of the group. Social conflict not only promotes cohesion in individual groups, but also promotes coalitions and associations with outside groups; they bring technological improvements, revitalize the economy and lubricate the social system. Above all they facilitate the release of tension and frustration and enable the social system to adjust itself.

5.5 DIALECTIC SOCIOLOGY OF RALF DAHRENDORF

Before discussing Dahrendorf's conflict theory it is necessary to have a brief description of dialectical sociology. Dialectical sociology is the organized study of social conflict which entails a conceptualization of opposing forces with conflicting interests. The dialectical model begins with a dichotomy of opposites such as slave and master, rich and poor etc. Dahrendorf's conceptualization is a dialectical model because he saw conflict as inherent in the dichotomous division of all social organizations into contending categories of roles- those who have authority and those who are subjected to authority which we will discuss in detail.

Dahrendorf referred to his conflict theory as the coercion theory of society which he has discussed in his major work *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. He disagrees with Marx that economic forces are the sole determinant of conflict in society. His aim was to develop a theory which would revise Marx to account for the shape of modern society. His conflict theory is centered around the concept of power and authority. According to Dahrendorf power and authority are scarce resources and differential distribution of power and authority becomes the basis of conflict.

Dahrendorf maintained that the social world is composed of social organizations which are imperatively coordinated associations rather than social system. This social organization is characterized by power relations with clusters of roles having power over others or we can say that authority structure is an inseparable part of every social organization. It is important to mention here that authority structure always involves relations of super-ordination and subordination which define rights and obligations. Where there are authority relations, the super-ordinate element controls the subordinate elements which clearly signify the unequal distribution of authority. The unequal distribution of authority creates a dichotomy of positions of domination and subjugation. Some are entrusted with legitimate right (authority) to exercise control over others.

According to Dahrendorf, the structural organization of society and groups is so designed that *“some positions are entrusted with a right to exercise control over other positions in order to ensure effective coercion; it means that there is a differential distribution of power and authority”*. The differential distribution of authority ultimately results in the formation of two dichotomous groups. Those in dominant position seek to maintain the status quo while those in subordinate positions seek change. A conflict of interest within any association is at least latent all the time, which means that legitimacy of authority is always precarious. The interest of superordinates and subordinates are objective in the sense that they are reflected in the expectations attached to position. Individuals are adjusted or adopted to their roles when they contribute to conflict between superordinates and subordinates. Dahrendorf called these unconscious role expectations ‘latent interests’. Manifests are those latent interests that have become conscious. He saw the analysis of connection between latent and manifest interests as a major task of conflict theory. Dahrendorf also distinguished three broad types of groups. The first is the quasi group (persons who share similar position in one of the many possible line of conflict), second is the interest group, they are the real agent of group conflict. They have a structure, a form of organization, a goal and personnel of members. Out of all the many interest groups emerge conflict groups, or those that actually engage in group conflict.

Dahrendorf suggested that authority is not bound by property rights and believed that *“class conflict is best seen as arising out of a dispute over distribution of authority in a given authority structure”* (Lopreato 1967: 281). Since every social organization is an imperatively co-ordinated association and the structure of authority is the sole basis of conflict, it is not possible to wither away conflict. Since differential distribution of authority is the fundamental source of conflict, changes resulting from class conflict are essentially changes in the authority system.

Dahrendorf has made some important propositions regarding the nature and consequences of conflict.

- The better organized the conflict group, the less violent is the conflict.

- Absolute deprivation leads to more violent conflict and relative deprivation results in less violent conflict.
- The more violent the conflict the more rapid the social change is.

Dahrendorf's conflict theory is not free from criticism. It has been criticized by many theorists. Collins viewed that his second proposition which we have mentioned above is not correct. Dahrendorf offers no evidence for it and it would seem from studies of revolutionary movements that violent conflict does not break out where the lowest class is most oppressed, but where it has the resources to mobilize itself. According to Collins his third proposition is also dubious. Many violent transfers of political power produce no social change at all.

5.6 ANALYTIC CONFLICT THEORY OF RANDALL COLLINS

Randall Collins was influenced by great sociological thinkers like Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Mead and Goffman etc. Karl Marx played an important role in the development of Collins's work. Collins portrayed Marx as "the great originator" of conflict theory. Though he did not agree with the entire Marxian thought, he agreed with the Marxian concept of the material world and the formation of division of labour. Collins adopted Weber's pluralistic model using an analytic framework, comparative historical approach. His conflict approach to stratification, which has drawn from phenomenological and ethno methodological theories, is an attempt to develop an integrated theory of social conflict. In his conflict theory Collins attempted to bridge the micro-macro division that exists within sociological perspective. Collins incorporated the idea of Marx and Weber and their analysis of the effect of the economic and political institutions on individuals' behaviour. His focus on individuals and their inner struggles reveals a micro-orientation. According to Collins:

" Conflict theory is not concerned only with overt conflict and social change. It is a perspective on all aspects of society and on social order in all its forms. The conflict theory on social organization is a theory of stratification. Societies are not merely differentiated;

differences among individuals and groups are generally forms of inequality which are produced by differences in resources and represent the pursuit of conflicting interests. Conflict theory proposes that the various forms of social organizations can be explained as parts of theory of stratification”.

Collins chooses to focus on social stratification because it is an institution that touches many features of life including wealth, politics careers, families, clubs, communities, lifestyles. Collins believed that Marx’s analysis of stratification was too limited. Marx was primarily interested in determinants of political power and what may be called as ‘theory of stratification’. He criticized Marxian theory as monocausal explanation for a multi causal world”. Collins preferred Weber’s notion of stratification which includes political power and social prestige to Marx’s economic determinism.

Collins contended that power and status are fundamental relational dimensions at the micro level of social interaction. Whatever else may be going on in social life, and however else one may wish to conceptualize it, human actors are deeply involved in relational issues of power and status and social theorists of all persuasions have dealt with these in one form or another. Collins assumed that there are certain scarce goods like power, wealth and prestige. Individuals strive to maximize their share of the scarce commodities. In this process those who possess a greater share of the goods, try to consolidate their position, maximize their interests and dominate the structural arrangements by various means, especially coercion. But all people dislike being ordered by someone and therefore try their best to avoid subordinate roles. Therefore conflict is inevitable, for everyone is in pursuit of scarce resources and the roles related to these desired resources. According to Collins violent coercion and ability to force others to behave in a certain way are the primary basis of conflict.

Ritzer viewed that Collins’s conflict approach to stratification can be reduced to three basic principles. These are accordingly:

- People live in self constructive subjective world.
- Other people may have the power to affect, or even control, an individual’s subjective experience.

- People frequently try to control the actions of others who oppose such attempts of control resulting often in interpersonal conflict. On the basis of these principles, Collins developed five principles of conflict analysis.
- Conflict theory must focus on real life rather than abstract formulations.
- Material arrangements affect interaction.
- In social situation of inequality between persons, those who possess the power position generally attempt to exploit those who lack resources.
- The role of cultural phenomenon such as beliefs, values, norms must be examined in terms of their relationship to interests, resources, and power.
- There must be a firm commitment to the scientific study of stratification and every other aspect of the social world.

However, in addition to social stratification Collins sought to extend his conflict theory to other social domains. He also looked at formal organization from a conflict perspective. He analyzed a wide range of social phenomena on the basis of a general assumption of conflicting interests of the parties involved, their location, available resources and options. Collins does not rely exclusively on any of the several pioneers of conflict theory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What are the two distinct traditions of conflict theory in the classical works?

Q2: Define conflict.

Q3: According to Simmel conflict is advantageous to the community as a whole. Why?

Q.4: Name the major work of Coser on conflict.

Q.5: What is dialectical sociology?

Q.6: What is the primary basis of conflict according to Collins?



5.7 LET US SUM UP

- Conflict theory generally views society as a system of social structures and relationships that are shaped mainly by economic forces.
- There are two distinct traditions of conflict theory in the classical works. The power relation tradition of political philosophy and the tradition of competitive struggle. The sociological theory of conflict is a combination of both these traditions.
- The modern conflict theory actually began with the work of Georg Simmel and was revised by Lewis Coser.
- According to Simmel conflict is not opposite to social order rather it is an intense form of interaction. Very often it brings people more closely together than normal social order.
- Simmel has rejected the notion that conflict is a temporary phase which is eventually transformed in to unity, and has insisted that peace and conflict are reciprocally intertwined in historical reality.

- Coser was very much influenced by the work of Simmel for which he has given much attention on conflict aspects of society. He has criticized Parsons's functionalism for not addressing the issue of conflict and also criticized other conflict theorists for overlooking the positive aspects of conflict.
- According to Coser conflict allows expression of hostility and the restoration of strained relationship. It leads to the elimination of specific sources of conflict between the parties and enables redressal of grievances through the establishment of new norms or the affirmation of new ones.
- Dahrendorf's conceptualization of conflict is a dialectical model because he saw conflict as inherent in the dichotomous division of all social organizations into contending categories of roles- those who have authority and those who are subjected to authority.
- According to Dahrendorf power and authority are scarce resources and differential distribution of power and authority becomes the basis of conflict.
- Since differential distribution of authority is the fundamental source of conflict, changes resulting from class conflict are essentially changes in the authority system.
- Collins's conflict approach to stratification has drawn from phenomenological and ethno methodological theories which is an attempt to develop an integrated theory of social conflict. He attempted to bridge the micro-macro division that exists within sociological perspectives.
- According to Collins violent coercion and ability to force others to behave in a certain way are the primary bases of conflict.



5.8 FURTHER READING

- 1) Abraham M. Francis. (2006). *Modern Sociological Theory An Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- 2) Abraham M. Francis and John Henry Morgan. (2007). *Sociological Thought*. Delhi, Bangalore: Macmillan India Ltd.
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- 7) Lopreto, Joseph. (1967). "Class Conflict and the Images of Society". *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 11(3):281-293.
- 8) Ritzer, Georg. (2008). *Modern Sociological Theory*. Mc Graw Hill.
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5. 9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The power relation tradition of political philosophy and the tradition of competitive struggle.

Ans to Q No 2: Conflict is an intense form of interaction. It brings people more closely together than normal social order.

Ans to Q No 3: According to Simmel conflict may be advantageous to the community as a whole because it promotes system integration and adaptation.

Ans to Q No 4: The Functions of Social Conflict, 1956.

Ans to Q No 5: Dialectical sociology is the organized study of social conflict which entails a conceptualization of opposing forces with conflicting interests.

Ans to Q No 6: According to Collins the primary basis of conflict is violent coercion.



5.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: Why Simmel considered conflict as functional to the society?

Q2: What are the important functions of violence?

Q3: What are the four basic principles of Collin's conflict approach?

Q4: Distinguish between latent and manifest interests.

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q1: 'Conflicts lead to the integration of society'. Elucidate the statement.

Q2: Critically discuss Dahrendorf's theory of conflict.

Q3: Discuss Collins's conflict approach to stratification. How is it different from Marxian conflict approach?

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UNIT 6: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Elements of Symbolic Interactionism and its basic principles.
- 6.4 Mead's Approach to Symbolic Interactionism
- 6.5 Blumer's Approach to Symbolic Interactionism
- 6.6 Criticism of Symbolic Interactionism
- 6.7 Garfinkel's Approach to Ethnomethodology
- 6.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.9 Further Reading
- 6.40 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 6.11 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the symbolic Interactionism perspective
- be familiar with the scholars associated with the symbolic interactionism perspective.
- explain the criticisms to symbolic interactionism.
- discuss the basics of ethnomethodology.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

It has been more than 70 years since the perspective of symbolic interactionism was first developed. While the earlier sociological traditions had a very clear handprint of European scholars, symbolic interactionism was the first 'distinctively American sociological theory', as Blumer put it. Some of the most important theorists associated with symbolic interactionism are George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Charles Cooley and W.I. Thomas.

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework related to the micro-level interactions between individual and the way in which society is created and maintained through these repeated interactions. Mead's work on self and society is the key literature that lies at the foundation of the theory of symbolic interactionism. Before this theory, the dominant theories in Sociology focused on macro level institutions and social structures. Thus, these approaches had a 'top-down' perspective on the relationship between structures and individuals, focusing on how the structures constrain the individuals. Directly deviating from this strand of dominant thought, symbolic interactionism's approach was one of 'bottom-up', focussing instead on micro-processes that surface in the daily interaction of the individuals and how these are the key elements in the quest to understand society. Contrary to the idea that macro structures constrain, and ultimately define the individual, in symbolic interactionism, the individual emerges as agentic and autonomous as well as being integral to the formation of their social world.

The use of language and symbols in communication assumes centrality in symbolic interactionism. The attention here is not on how social institutions objectively define and impact individuals but rather on the question of the varied subjective interpretations of meanings and symbols by individuals and the way that they make sense of their world. The shift in theorization is from objective structures to subjective meanings.

In the previous unit we have tried to understand conflict perspective to understand society. In this unit we shall discuss the Symbolic Interactionist perspective and also try to understand Ethnomethodology as an approach to study society.

6.3 ELEMENTS OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND ITS BASIC PRINCIPLES.

Blumer coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and the three premises articulated by him are central to understanding this theoretical perspective:

- The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them

- The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
- The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters.

Along with the above three premises forwarded by Blumer, there are other implicit assumptions that are central to this perspective and form its foundational philosophy. We will briefly discuss them below

- *People have symbolic capacities*, which means that they have the ability to use symbols and to give meanings to them. Human beings do not just react to stimuli but are able to give meaning to them and subjectively interpret this stimuli experience before acting in terms of the interpreted meanings. So, language becomes a very important tool for this.
- *Interactions are central to becoming human*. Symbolic interactionists do not believe that people are born humans but rather that people become humans and acquire human qualities through interactions with others. These human qualities like, to understand symbols, to speak, to think and make plans, to understand roles and the idea of the self, etc. are not biologically given but rather have to be learned through interactions with other humans.
- *People are thinking and conscious beings with the agency to shape their own behaviour*. As mentioned in the above point, people develop their minds and their sense of self through their interactions in the community and thus develop the capacity to think of oneself as an object and interact with themselves reflexively. This leads to there being some degree of autonomy and agency in one's behaviour. Instead of there being mere reactions to stimuli and objects, human beings are able to ascertain what objects and which stimuli they want to take into account.
- *People are purposive creatures*. As mentioned above, instead of merely reacting to stimuli, human beings instead act in and toward

situations. We give meaning and interpret a given situation based on our interactions with others. As we come up with a 'definition of the situation', we can then determine in what ways to act in the given scenario. Though, such an interpretation of the situation might not be accurate or wise, human beings do act purposefully by appraising the situation at hand.

- *Society consists of human beings engaged in symbolic interaction.* Blumer conceived of society as a fluid but structured process. Thus, symbolic interactionists view this kind of process as depending on the ability of the individuals in the society to act purposively with each other but also to be able to presume each other's perspectives and be able to co-ordinate their unfolding acts with the others through symbolic communication and interpretation. Thus, even though the meanings to be attributed to symbols might be predetermined in a given society, human beings still have the ability to exercise their agencies since society is a product of the joint acts people engage in together.
- *To understand people's social acts, we need to understand the meanings people give to these acts.* Symbolic interactionists stress the importance of understanding the world of meanings and the ways in which this can differ across different cultures and societies. Thus, in order to understand any society, one would need to understand the world of meanings there. Thus, symbolic interactionism also calls for sociological methods that would provide a view into the inner world of meanings of groups or societies under investigation. For this insider's view, the researcher must then 'take the role of' or be empathetic to the groups they are studying. Thus, researchers that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which their research subjects live.

6.4 MEAD'S APPROACH TO SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Mead can be called the central figure in the development of the ideas that formed the perspective of symbolic interactionism. Though he published little in his lifetime, his lectures had a profound effect for theorizing in sociology. Posthumously published, his books *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938) and *The Philosophy of the Present* (1959), contain the central tenets that influenced the foundational ideas of symbolic interactionism. Some of the key figures who influenced Mead's work were pragmatists Charles Peirce and William James, the sociologists Charles Horton Cooley and James Mark Baldwin, Sigmund Freud as well as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Mead developed a groundbreaking theory that the self arises from communication, interaction and role-taking. For Mead, both 'mind' and 'self' are in nature, social and language is the vital factor in the formation of these. Along with this, the individuals have the ability to be reflexive and reflect on themselves as an object that they have agency over. The perception of others also is very important and this perception of others has an impact on the individual's perception of himself or herself. Mead stated, 'The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self' (is the 'generalized other' which is how society is perceived as in the mind of the individual.

Mead drew the differences between the 'I' and the 'me', which are the two different processes into which the 'self' breaks down while in the process of social interaction. While the 'I' is impulsive: a spontaneous response of the self to the external world, the 'me' is more organized response devised by the self, having interpreted meanings from the actions of the others.

6.5 BLUMER'S APPROACH TO SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Herbert Blumer was a student of Mead and he became the most important proponent of his ideas. Championing Mead's theories and applying them in his own writings, Blumer published his book *Symbolic Interactionism*

(1969), which became the most important piece of explicative scholarship on the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which is a term that Blumer coined in order to capture the essence of this theoretical perspective he was developing. Blumer taught at Chicago University and he had a major influence on a group of graduate students, which included Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, Helena Lopata, Anselm Strauss, Gregory Stone and Ralph Turner. This group was instrumental in propagating the symbolic interactionist perspective further and came to be known as the Second Chicago School.

In the words of Blumer himself, "The term 'symbolic interaction' refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning that they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions."

While in the case of Marxism or Functionalism, human behavior is seen as a product of 'stimulus response variables' such as class, Blumer argued for a process of self-indication, where social change is a product of interpretation, which is not brought about by factors external to people. The only thing that precedes action is the process of interpretation. Human beings identify and give meaning to what they believe to be of significance in what they will do. Blumer argues that such an identification of something untangles it out of its setting and by doing so, provides it meaning. Human beings act on the basis of such symbolization, identifying meanings and significance for future actions.

6.6 CRITICISM OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

We can divide the criticisms against symbolic interactionism into two: the criticism from within symbolic interactionists and criticism from

outside. The biggest criticism levied on symbolic interactionism from outside, is of course on its central focus on micro-processes and what the critics perceive as its lack of importance to macro structures and the ways in which the institutions influence social processes and outcomes.

Research done with this perspective is also often under critical scrutiny because it purports to interpretation of subjective meanings. The absence of objectivity or the difficulty in remaining objective while trying to study a society with an insider's perspective (as the methods of symbolic interactionism suggests) is also perceived as a weakness. Others criticize the extremely narrow focus of symbolic interaction since its focus is on micro processes and not macro structures. But of course, the proponents of symbolic interactionism would consider the very same points as its strength.

The criticism from within symbolic interactionism is characterised by the four main schools of thought that have been identified under the umbrella of symbolic interactionism: the Chicago school, the Iowa/Indiana school, ethnomethodology, and dramaturgy. This strand of criticism aims to correct some of the perceived shortcomings of this perspective and sharpen it further to be of use to the researcher studying society and social actions. A rich body of scholarship has emerged because of the critical appraisal of symbolic interactionism by the researchers engaged within it.

Through the years, there have been many schools of thoughts within symbolic interactionism which have ensured that the application of this perspective has been done in a wide range of fields and its impact has been felt across divergent areas of research. Ethnomethodology, phenomenology, dramaturgy as well as many relevant works on identity and social roles have leaned on symbolic interactionist perspective for their theoretical underpinnings. Along with this, in the sub-field of cultural studies, use of narratives as sociological method, feminist scholarship and studies on deviance and post-modernism have benefitted from the symbolic interactionist perspective.

6.7 GARFINKEL'S APPROACH TO ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Ethnomethodology has remained outside mainstream sociological theories but has largely held its ground. This sociological perspective was developed by Harold Garfinkel and has its roots in Alfred Schutz's work which was instrumental in the development of phenomenological sociology which analysed everyday life- or lifeworld, and the uniquely human character of social interaction which shapes everyday world, instead of taking it for granted as something already given.

The ethnomethodological perspective emerged as a reaction to the mainstream sociological perspectives of that time, which imposed a set of sociological categories on the ordinary individual. Sociological theories re-interpret the experiences of the ordinary people in the process of theorizing, thereby giving the impression of the deficiency of the ordinary person's account. Thus, sociological theorizing can deviate far away from what ordinary people would consider as being their realities. For example, 'structure' as defined by the structural functionalists might be unrecognizable and un-relatable to an ordinary person's idea of it. Thus ethnomethodology seeks to amend this gap and proposes to investigate how individuals ('members') themselves construct their world.

In the words of Garfinkel himself here, the "central recommendation is that the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings "account-able." The "reflexive," or "incarnate" character of accounting practices and accounts make up the crux of that recommendation". The assumption here is that there is a general orderliness in society and the members of the society produce this sort of orderliness reflexively. Members in the society have to continuously be engaged in making sure that their activities make sense to others while also accurately ascertaining the meanings in the activities of the others. There is a shared method in the society in order to ensure that there is a structure to the interaction that happens between individuals, which is possible because of the reflexivity exercised by individuals in taking account of their interactions

with others. Thus, the focus here is on the methods used by people in everyday life to account for (or make sense of) their activities – both to themselves and others.

Garfinkel's chosen research methods have been very ground breaking in Sociology. He would send his students out to the field to perform a variety of exercises. One of these exercises was to ask 'What do you mean?' relentlessly during conversations, which lead to questioning the very fluidity of meaning itself. He was also a proponent of conversation analysis, which studied social interaction using both verbal and non-verbal cues. These studies in conversation analysis would show how much of meaning in social interaction is created by assumption of shared knowledge of covert cues between speakers, which might not make any sense when read by someone without any such shared knowledge.

Another method that he used was known as 'breaching experiment' where he tested social norms and social conformity by the researcher themselves breaching these social norms and boundaries by creating out of the normal situations and behaving awkwardly. The participants, except for the researcher, are unaware of such a deliberate breach and the resulting responses of anger, laughter, frustration or embarrassment was studied by the ethnomethodologist, in order to find out how these subtle or even obvious, societal rules and norms not only influenced behavior but also shaped social order

A common criticism of ethnomethodology is that it does not tell us anything very important. The focus on the everydayness of individuals means that big political or economic events are kept outside the domain of this perspective. Its detractors have declared this as its biggest weakness. Another criticism is that ethnomethodology does not provide us with any new knowledge and its findings are too simplistic or things that are already known.

Today, ethnomethodology is not prominent perspective in sociology but it has left its indelible mark on the discipline by questioning many taken-for-granted assumptions about 'meanings' and the everyday world. It is not as controversial anymore and many ethnomethodological insights have

made its ways into the current sociological understanding of social action and social structure.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Who coined the phrase symbolic interactionism?

Q2: Do symbolic interactionists study micro level processes or macro level processes?

Q3: Which research technique is a symbolic interactionist most likely to use?

Q4: Do symbolic interactionists believe in being subjective or objective in studying society?

Q.5: Who are the central figures in the development of the symbolic interactionist perspective?

Q.6: Who developed the perspective of ethnomethodology?



6.8 LET US SUM UP

- Symbolic interactionism was the first distinctively American sociological theory
- Some of the most important theorists associated with symbolic interactionism are George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Charles Cooley and W.I. Thomas.
- Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework related to the micro- level interactions between individual and the way in which society is created and maintained through these repeated interactions.
- The structural functionalist approach had a 'top-down' perspective on the relationship between structures and individuals, focusing on how the structures constrain the individuals. Directly deviating from this strand of dominant thought, symbolic interactionism's approach was one of 'bottom-up', focussing instead on micro-processes that surface in the daily interaction.
- The attention of symbolic interactionism is not on how social institutions objectively define and impact individuals but rather on the question of the varied subjective interpretation of meanings and symbols.
- People have symbolic capacities.
- Interactions are central to becoming humans.
- People are thinking and conscious beings with the agency to shape their own behaviour.
- People are purposive creatures.
- Society consists of human beings engaged in symbolic interaction.
- To understand people's social acts, we need to understand the meanings people give to these acts.
- Mead developed a groundbreaking theory that the self arises from communication, interaction and role-taking. For Mead, both 'mind'

and 'self' are in nature, and language is the vital factor in the formation of these.

- Blumer argued for a process of self-indication, where social change is a product of interpretation, which is not brought about by factors external to people. The only thing that precedes act is the process of interpretation.
- The biggest criticism levied on symbolic interactionism is on its central focus on micro-processes and its non-prioritisation of macro structures and institutions.
- Ethnomethodology was developed by Harold Garfinkel and has its roots in Alfred Schutz's work.
- Ethnomethodology proposed to investigate how individuals ('members') themselves construct their world.
- The assumption here is that there is a general orderliness in society and the members of the society produce this sort of orderliness reflexively.



6.9 FURTHER READING

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6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to QNo 1: Herbert Blumer coined the phrase 'symbolic interactionism'.

Ans to QNo 2: Symbolic interactionists study micro-level processes.

Ans to QNo 3: Researchers that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which their research subjects live.

Ans to QNo 4: Symbolic interactionists believe in being subjective as they aim to study the subjective interpretation of meanings.

Ans to QNo 5: The central figures in the development of the symbolic interactionist perspective are Blumer and Mead.

Ans to QNo6: Harold Garfinkel developed the perspective of ethnomethodology.



6.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

- Q1:** Who are the important theorists associated with Symbolic interactionism and what contributions did they make?
- Q2:** Going by Blumer's articulation, what are the basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism?
- Q3:** What is ethnomethodology in sociology?

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

- Q1:** Along with the three premises forwarded by Blumer, what are the other implicit assumptions of the perspective of symbolic interactionism?
- Q2:** Why is the micro level approach of symbolic interactionism relevant in studying society?
- Q3:** What are some of the contributions made by the perspective of symbolic interactionism?

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UNIT 7: PHENOMENOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Learning Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 Phenomenology: Definition and Characteristics
- 7.4 Phenomenology: Key Thinkers
- 7.5 Phenomenology as Method
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 Further Reading
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 7.9 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading going through this unit, you should be able to-

- understand what is phenomenology
- explain the significance of phenomenology as a theoretical concept and analytical tool
- discuss the limitations and advantages of phenomenology as a theoretical concept and analytical tool.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Traditional theories in social science emphasised on a certain kind of detachment or a distance between the one who is studying and the one who is being studied. An objective understanding of the society was what the positivist approach to social sciences advocated for. In that process the positivist social scientists tried to find out a social science counterpart of the natural sciences. However, positivist approach had its own limitations because studying society is not similar to studying natural sciences. Human beings are not innate objects who react to external stimuli. They are social beings who 'behave' and 'act' rather than just 'react'. The reason and logic which drive the scientific spirit of natural sciences are also applicable to social sciences, but the application of that spirit would be different in case

of the latter. The scientific spirit of social sciences fundamentally takes into account objectivity, but it also has to take into account the norms, values and different subjectivities that can be observed to be present in human societies. Since it is human beings that social sciences aim to study, hence, the empirical and subjective experiences of the humans have to be considered and analysed while forming objective conclusions about human societies. It becomes important to understand how humans, the object of study for the social scientists, perceive their own world through their own worldview and form social realities around themselves. Negating their life experiences and their worldviews would provide an imperfect and half-baked understanding of human society and this is precisely where phenomenology as a theoretical concept comes in.

The primary aim of phenomenology is to understand the ways in which human beings construct and reconstruct meanings around them. The key concept here is intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity basically refers to a variety of interactions that human beings experience. The shared meanings that people construct in the process of their interaction with one another lead them to make their own sense of the world around them. The everyday lives of these people also play important roles in forming these meanings. Intersubjectivity thus works as an everyday resource using which human beings make sense of their social and cultural worlds. While talking about phenomenology, what is important to understand is that the meanings that get formed in the process of interaction among people need not be the same as what the social scientist would think them to be. For phenomenology, the experiences of the people are important not because of how they get interpreted by the social scientist, but because they exist independently of the latter's interpretation of them.

7.3 PHENOMENOLOGY: DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS

Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy defines phenomenology as the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person point of view. In its literal sense, phenomenology is the study of phenomena.

That means it studies occurrences as they appear in our experience. The way human beings experience things is thus the prime interest of phenomenology. As said above, it studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective point of view. The view in consideration is thus essentially the view of the first person. The structure of these experiences range from memory, perception, thought, emotion, desires, imagination, social activities, etc.

We had mentioned above in the introduction that the key component of understanding phenomenology is intersubjectivity. From a first person point of view, intersubjectivity comes in when we undergo acts of empathy. This means that intersubjective experiences are essentially empathetic experiences which are gained when we put ourselves in others' shoes. Also, it is important to note that while phenomenology acknowledges the subjective experiences of humans as rational ones, it argues that there are certain pre-existing beliefs that underlie the structure of this rationality. And these beliefs are there in our unconscious minds as we experience the world in its natural attitude. This argument has been put forward by Edmund Husserl who is considered to be one of the founding fathers of phenomenology. Husserl uses the term 'lifeworld' to refer to the way used by the members of one or more social groups to structure the world into objects.

As a philosophical concept phenomenology can be traced back to the pioneering work of Immanuel Kant and the long-term philosophical problem of how our knowledge of the world is based on our limited perceptions of it as these are filtered through the implicit schemas already in our minds. In a general sense we understand that our perceptions do not necessarily correspond precisely to the way the world really is. In everyday life, we unconsciously make allowances for the fact that the sounds and sights that register on our ears and eyes will vary according to our distance from their source. Kant's position was that in the final analysis it is impossible to know the world as it really is, in itself. Instead, all we can know is based on our perceptions of the world as they are filtered through our senses and organized through our particular cognitive frameworks. As applied to

Sociology this perspective reflects the notion that the way we see and interpret the world is based largely on the formative influence of our social environment. The cultural world into which we are born provides not only the language we use to communicate but also the perceptual categories and cognitive and interpretive frameworks through which we actually perceive and make sense of our world.

The fundamental objective of phenomenology are to study the phenomena, which is experienced in various acts of consciousness. In this sense there are two types of phenomena; mental and physical. Mental phenomena constitutes of what occurs in the mind when we experience something. They also include the acts of consciousness, or its contents. On the other hand, physical phenomena include the objects of external perception starting with colors and shapes. Phenomenology envisages isolating phenomena by suspending all consideration of their objective reality or subjective association. Here the phenomenologist is involved in a search for certainty. In this sense by equating phenomenology with philosophy, the latter is conceived as a rigorous science dealing with ideal objects or essences of things originating in the consciousness.

7.4 PHENOMENOLOGY: KEY THINKERS

- **Edmund Husserl:** Phenomenology as a branch of Philosophy owes its origin primarily to the work of Husserl. Edmund Husserl is considered to be the principal founder of phenomenology. He was one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th Century. His significant academic contribution ranged across almost all the areas of philosophy. His influence can further be seen in linguistics, sociology and cognitive psychology to quite an extent. His first phenomenological work, *Logical Investigations*, was published in two volumes around 1900.

Husserl conceived phenomenology in three important ways. Firstly, it was conceived as the science of sciences, which endeavoured to discover the basis of consciousness. In the second view, phenomenology was conceived as a first philosophy and therefore, it is coextensive with philosophy, as traditionally it was the latter which had been enjoying the

status of first philosophy. The third conception of phenomenology is the most important one, where it is conceived as a transcendental idealism. This view conceives the transcendental ego as the source of all meaning.

Husserl argued that phenomenology basically aims to study human phenomena without considering questions of their causes, their objective reality, or even their appearances. Husserl gave the concept of 'transcendental phenomenology' to throw light on how the objects surrounding our everyday life which we often take for granted as having natural and naive attitudes actually have structures that allow or enable them to constitute themselves into consciousness.

The phenomenological account of experience asserts two things. Firstly, it claims that everyday experiences are intentional. Secondly, it affirms that experiences always reveal their objects from a perspective. Hence the phenomenological account of intentionality reconciles the objectivism of intentionality with perspectivism of empiricism.

The primary aim of Husserl's phenomenology is to isolate the essential aspects which constitute meanings. In other words, it seeks to isolate the essences. Everything perceived is bound up with the essence of perception which is different from the object that exists in nature. Husserl argues that every intentional experience gives meaning. In other words, intentional experiences have the essential characteristic of giving some meaning. The fundamental aim of phenomenology is to grasp the perceived as such. It tries to grasp what is essentially given. The task of phenomenology is to capture the phenomenon as meant. Phenomenology searches for essences in the consciousness, which is the domain of essences. It searches for pure mental processes which are immanent to the sphere of consciousness that investigates them. The ultimate focus is on pure consciousness. The various mental processes like remembering, imagining, judging, willing, describing, feeling, perceiving etc. have their own essences. The phenomenological method examines these essences, by excluding what do not lie in the mental act itself. It thus builds a science of essences. In order to find the essence of consciousness, phenomenology

excludes what is non-essence. For this the major hurdle is the natural attitude, which a phenomenologist has to overcome.

- **Alfred Schutz:** Alfred Schutz attempted to bring in the thoughts of Edmund Husserl into social world and social sciences. His work *Phenomenology of the Social World* provided philosophical foundations to the sociological work of Max Weber. Schutz's basic aim was to look at the processes through which human beings build up the meaning of their own actions, and while doing this he looked at the structure of the social world. What he emphasised on was that human beings living in the same social environment constantly try to grasp one another's experience, and in doing so they already adopt the attitudes of social scientists towards one another.

Like Husserl, Schutz too argued that phenomenology has to be a rigorous scientific enterprise. For Schutz, the utmost reality is the intersubjective world of everyday life. However, the duty of scientists is to detach themselves from the everyday mundane practices of the life-world in order to better analyze and observe them. While actors in the real life-world obtain their knowledge through the experience of everyday life and an accumulated stock of life-worldly knowledge, scientists draw what they know from their existing stock of theoretical knowledge. Scientific temper and everyday life have to be considered as completely different worlds, separating common sense from scientific knowledge.

Schutz argued that in both everyday life and science, people resort to constructs or ideal types for interpreting and grasping the concerned reality. Social scientists also build their constructs or ideal types on the basis of the constructs of everyday life. This is called typification. Obtaining an objective science that is constituted by subjective meaning structures is made possible through typification. Schutz was thus primarily interested in constructing ideal types of social actors and actions. Ideal types, moreover, must meet certain criteria in order to meet the requirements of scientific rigor. Schutz propounded five such criteria for his ideal types: the postulates of relevance, adequacy, logical consistency, compatibility, and subjective interpretation.

Schutz criticized natural sciences as being dependent on basic presupposition of appropriation. He argued that without understanding the object of study, i.e., social reality, one is bound to presuppose that the methods used by natural sciences are appropriate to its study. Schutz thus attempted to understand and clarify social reality and then to explain how actors make sense of their social realities by understanding each other's motives in typical terms. He argued that unlike experiments in natural sciences, such mutual understanding takes place without either somehow or other penetrating into the other's private, inner sanctum, or reducing the other to the status of animal organism responding to stimuli. Given this account of social reality, in which actors give meaning to their world, as opposed to physical reality whose objects (e.g., electrons, quarks) do not interpret their world, Schutz argued that the appropriate social scientific method is that which involves developing constructs of everyday actor's constructs.

It is crucial to note that Schutz viewed the life-world as having been created by the actions of people in the past. One's life-world, in other words, predates an individual's birth and is given to them to struggle with and attempt to transform. The life-world is therefore constraining, and people are always trying to shape or dominate it. Another important dimension of the life-world is knowledge. Schutz emphasized actors' knowledge of typifications and recipes, skills, and useful knowledge.

Schutz's work has to be seen as an attempt to construct a theoretical perspective that emphasizes on both how actors create their own social world and how the social world in turn impacts the actors.

7.5 PHENOMENOLOGY AS METHOD

Mainstream research methods in sociology and social anthropology have always been executed through a hierarchical relation between the researcher and the researched. In other words, dominant research methods have always used a 'view from the above', or a sense of privilege, ensuring a coloring of the claims to objectivity by value biases. Introducing reflexivity in research then attempts to bridge the gap between the researcher and

researched. It refutes a universal social reality and acknowledges that knowledge is situated and social reality is contextual. Reflexivity enables the researcher to critically engage with the research and makes one aware of one's own location as a researcher.

Any serious consideration of method in social science quickly runs into basic issues such as the relation between theory and empirical observation, and how we conceptualize phenomena. In turn, any reflection on these matters raises still more fundamental problems of objectivity, of the status of our knowledge. Phenomenology encompasses multiple perspectives. It is not a single unified philosophy or standpoint. As an approach, phenomenology proposes that a phenomenon be described instead of being explained and it focuses on the very things as they manifest themselves. It can be seen as a return to the lived world, the world of experience, which can be understood as a starting point of all sciences. Focusing on the very things means turning to the world of experience by taking into account that before any objective reality, there is a subject which experiences, before any objectivity there is a pre-given world and before any knowledge there is a life on which it is based. This means that any knowledge has its origin in experience which is pre-reflexive. The basic premise of phenomenology is thus that the perceiver determines meaning, and therefore it is human perception and not external influences or objects of the material world which is at the core of phenomenological analysis. It is human consciousness that determines their reality. Whatever appears in the human mind as it manifests itself in consciousness is the phenomenological project. Therefore, interpreting everyday life experience from a phenomenological view requires a close analysis of how ordinary human consciousness perceives its day-to-day life world.

Though phenomenology is criticized for being inherently individualistic and regressive in its preoccupation with individual perception rather than the material forces of power, domination, it can be of great use as an approach to get meaningful insights to the social phenomena where the presence of individual agency may have been ruled out while studying a particular phenomenon, in this case, the lived experience of menstruation.

The deconstructionist critique also argues that in human consciousness meaning is always colored or filtered, that adopting phenomenology as method can result in biased representation of meaning. But, to refute this criticism, phenomenology as a method approaches a particular phenomenon with a conscious awareness that human consciousness on one hand reveals idiosyncratic meanings, contingent truths, and felt-sensing perspectives that are born from materiality, power, and the complexity of presence, and on the other hand uncovers what it feels like to experience all these elements up close and personal. Phenomenology, thus, attempts to recognize and describe the role of consciousness in the achievement of knowledge. Its main contribution has been the manner in which it has steadfastly protected the subjective view of experience as a necessary part of any full understanding of nature of knowledge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: a) Phenomenology is the study of _____.

- b) The primary aim of phenomenology is to understand the ways in which human beings _____.
- c) Phenomenology can be seen as a return to the _____.
- d) The key component of understanding phenomenology is _____.
- e) A phenomenon is experienced in various acts of _____.
- f) There are two types of phenomena- _____ and _____.



7.6 LET US SUM UP

- Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person point of view.
- Phenomenology is the study of phenomena. That means it studies occurrences as they appear in our experience. The way human beings experience things is thus the prime interest of phenomenology.
- The primary aim of phenomenology is to understand the ways in which human beings construct and reconstruct meanings around them.
- Phenomenology can be seen as a return to the lived world, the world of experience, which can be understood as a starting point of all science.
- The key component of understanding phenomenology is intersubjectivity.
- Intersubjectivity basically refers to a variety of interactions that human beings experience.
- Intersubjective experiences are essentially empathetic experiences which are gained when we put ourselves in others' shoes.
- The basic premise of phenomenology is that the perceiver determines meaning, and therefore it is about human perception and not about external influences or objects of the material world.
- The fundamental objective of phenomenology is to study the phenomena, which are experienced in various acts of consciousness.
- There are two types of phenomena- mental and physical.
- Mental phenomena constitute of what occur in the mind when we experience something. They also include the acts of consciousness, or its contents.
- Physical phenomena include the objects of external perception starting with colors and shapes.

- Phenomenology approaches a particular phenomenon with a conscious awareness that human consciousness on one hand reveals idiosyncratic meanings, contingent truths, and felt-sensing perspectives that are born from materiality, power, and the complexity of presence, and on the other hand uncovers what it feels like to experience all these elements up close and personal.
- The main contribution of phenomenology has been the manner in which it has steadfastly protected the subjective view of experience as a necessary part of any full understanding of nature of knowledge.



7.7 FURTHER READING

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WEB RESOURCES

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schutz/>

<http://nptel.ac.in/courses/109106051/Module%205/Chapter%2032.pdf>



7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| a) Phenomena | b) construct and reconstruct meanings around them |
| c) Life world | d) Intersubjectivity |
| e) Consciousness | f) Mental; Physical |

7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: What is phenomenology? Briefly write about the types of phenomena.

Q2: What is the key component of phenomenology? Describe briefly.

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Briefly describe Husserl's phenomenology.

Q2: Briefly describe Schutz's approach to phenomenology.

Q3: Reflexivity enables social scientists to critically engage with their research. Do you agree? Why?

Q4: Discuss the role of phenomenology as an approach.

*** **



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