

# Centre for Distance and Online Education

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU

JAMMU



**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**

**M.A. SOCIOLOGY**

**SEMESTER—II**

**COURSE TITLE: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY**

**COURSE NO: SOC-C-202**

**UNIT: I-IV**

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**SOC-C-202**  
**SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY**

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**Syllabus of Sociology M.A. 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester for the examination to be held in the year  
May 2026, 2027 and 2028 (NON-CBCS for CDOE)**

**Course No: SOC-C-202**

**Credits: 6**

**Duration of examination: 3 hours.**

**Title: Sociological Theory**

**Maximum Marks: 100**

**a) Semester Examination (External): 70**

**b) Session Assessment (Internal): 30**

**Objective:** This course is intended to introduce the students to the substantive theoretical and methodological issues which have shaped the sociological thinking in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which continue to concern the practitioners of sociology today. The main focus of this course will be on structural, functional conflict and interaction theories.

**Unit-I**      **Functionalism: Social System and Functional Analysis**

B. Malinowski: Culture Functionalism. Talcott Parsons: General Theory of Action and Social System. R.K. Merton: Critique and Reformulation of Functional Analysis.

**Unit -II**      **Structural-Functionalism and Structuralism**

A.R. Radcliffe Brown - The Idea of Social Structure. S.F. Nadel - Social Structure & the Problem of Role Analysis: Levi-Strauss - Structural Analysis.

**Unit-III**      **Conflict Theory**

R. Dahrendorf - Critique of Marxian Theory of Conflict: L. Coser-Functional Analysis of Conflict: R. Collins-Conflict and Social Change.

**Unit-IV**      **Symbolic Interactionism & Dramaturgical Approach**

Symbolic Interactionism: G.M. Mead & H. Blumer; Dramaturgical Approach: Erving Goffman.

## **NOTE FOR PAPER SETTING:**

### **A. Session Assessment Internal (30 marks)**

There will be three Internal Assessment Assignments carrying the total weightage of 30 marks.

#### **IAA1. Long Answer Type Questions (10X1=10 Marks)**

Long answer type question (of maximum 1200 words) of 10 marks (one to be attempted, out of two, each from unit I and II).

#### **IAA2. Short Answer Type Questions (5X2=10 Marks)**

Two short answer type questions (of about 600 words), each of 5 marks. These shall be taken from units III and IV.

#### **IAA3. Very Short Answer Type Questions (2.5X4=10 Marks)**

Four very short answer type questions (of about 250 words), each of 2.5 marks. These shall be taken from all the four units.

### **B. Semester Examination External (70 marks)**

**The question paper will consist of two sections A and B.**

**Section A** will consist of eight long answer-type questions, two questions from each unit. The candidate will be required to answer four questions, selecting one from each unit. Each question will carry 13 marks (**13 X 4=52 marks**).

**Section B** will consist of eight short answer-type questions, two questions from each unit. The candidate will be required to answer four questions, selecting one from each unit. Each question will carry 4.5 marks (**4.5 X 4=18 marks**).

## Prescribed Readings

1. Abraham, M. F. 1999. *Modern Sociological Theory*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
2. Brown, A. R. 1971. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. London: Cohen and West.
3. Coser, L. 1977. *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: HBJ.
4. Dahrendorf, R. 1979. *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial*. London: Routledge.
5. Fletcher, R. 2000. *The Making of Sociology: A Study of Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
6. Goffman, E. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. U.K.: Prentice Hall.
7. Judge, P. S. 2012. *Classical Sociological Theory: Functionalism, Conflict and Action*. New Delhi: Pearsons Publishing Co.
8. Kundu, A. 2012. *Sociological Theory*. Delhi: Pearson Publications.
9. Malinowski, B. 1944. *A Scientific Theory of Culture*. California: California Press.
10. Martindale, D. 1990. *The Nature and types of Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
11. Mead, G. H. 1964. *On Social Psychology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
12. Merton, R. K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.
13. Morgan, A. 1998. *Sociological Thought*. Delhi: Macmillan India Limited.
14. Parsons, T. 1949. *The Structure of Social Action*. New Delhi: Amerind Publishing Co.
15. Powers, H. H. 2010. *Making Sense of Social Theory: A Practical Introduction*. U.K.: Rowman and Little filed Publishers.
16. Ritzer, G. 1996. *Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Tata-Mc Grew Hill.
17. Strauss, L. C. 1963. *Structural Anthropology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

18. Sydie, A. a. 2002. *Classical Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Pine Forge Press.
19. Turner, B. S. 1999. *Classical Sociology*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
20. Turner, J. H. 2014. *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications.

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**FUNCTIONALISM, SOCIAL SYSTEM AND FUNCTION  
ANALYSIS**

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**STRUCTURE**

- 1.0. Learning Objectives**
- 1.1. Introduction**
- 1.2. Concept**
- 1.3. Historical roots – Spencer, Durkheim, Malinowski, Brown, Parsons and Merton.**
- 1.4 Herbert Spencer**
- 1.5 Emile Durkheim**
- 1.6 Bronislaw Malinowski**
- 1.7 Radcliffe Brown**
- 1.8 Talcott Parsons**
- 1.9 Robert K. Merton**
- 1.10 Critical Evaluation**
- 1.11 Let us sum up**
- 1.12 Glossary**
- 1.13 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 1.14 Lesson End Exercise**

## **1.15 Suggested Readings**

## **1.16 Answers to check your progress**

## **1.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will understand:**

- **The concept of function in the historical roots of the functional tradition;**
- **Brief note on the contribution of major functionalists; and**
- **Meaning of functionalism**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Robert Nisbet, the sociologist, once commented that “functionalism is, without any doubt, the single most significant body of theory in the social sciences in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the intellectual giants of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century – Comte, Spencer, Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown, Parsons and Merton, to name but a few – have engaged in the functional analysis of the social world.

Functional analysis examines social phenomena in terms of their consequences for the broader society. For example, what does the kinship system do for the society? or What does a religious ritual do for the society? or What are the functions of a government, of classes, or of any social phenomenon?

## **1.2 CONCEPT**

In common sense use, the term function has different connotations:

1. As an activity, the term function refers to social gatherings, public ceremonies, meetings etc.
2. In mathematical sense, function is a variable whose value is determined by those of two or more variables.

3. As an occupational role, the term function may refer to a specialized activity, duties, work or a set of official roles to a public servant.

But in sociological sense, the term function may mean an appropriate and sustaining activity i.e. the part played by a unit within the context of a larger whole. Martindale called it “system—determined and system sustaining activity. For him, the term function refers to positive and negative consequences of social institutions and processes.

### **1.3 HISTORICAL ROOTS**

The notion of function was as old as recorded history. The social philosophers had recognized the relationships between cultural institutions and used these in their explanation of society. They asserted the necessary relations between social institutions, but did not; however, construct a theory about functions. Even August Comte, the founding founder of sociology, while using function as a major methodological tool, was more intent on creating a new science in the image of positivism and left function itself largely unexplained.

It was Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim who gave importance to the concept of function in sociology. In the writing of Durkheim, the concept of function attained greater methodological significance and he is widely regarded as functionalist by sociologists and anthropologists alike.

### **1.4 HERBERT SPENCER**

Though Herbert Spencer is credited with organic analogizing and ‘social Darwinism, he however brought to functionalism some of the Key elements from his organic analogies in relation to society. The most important of them are:

1. Society is a system. It is coherent whole of connected parts.
2. This system can only be understood in terms of the operation of specific structures, each of which has a function for maintaining the social whole.
3. Systems have needs that must be met if they are to survive. Therefore, the function of a structure must be determined by the discovery of the needs that it meets.

While Spencer is given credit for explicitly formulating the tenets of modern functionalism, he however, became highly controversial with regard to his ideas over functional needs.

### **1.5 EMILE DURKHEIM**

Durkheim borrowed, selectively from Spencer and in doing so, he forged functionalism into a coherent and acceptable doctrine. In his first book, 'The Division of Labour in society' (which you have studied in the first semester) Durkheim asked: what is the function of the division of labour in society? The division of labour, for example, for Durkheim, provides a new basis of solidarity in rapidly differentiating societies. Further, he states that "if this need for solidarity is not met by division of labour, pathological states like "anomie" are likely to occur. In his (Durkheim) last major work in 1912 (The Elementary forms of the Religious Life), he sought to uncover the causes and functions of religion. Durkheim maintained that religion had been throughout human history one of the great regulating functions of society. He further noted that all religions serve the same needs i.e. provide a basis for the integration of society. It unites people into a common system of ideas which then regulates the affairs.

### **1.6 BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI**

As such, it is Malinowski who made a clear-cut use of functional approach in the analysis of culture in anthropology in his first book, "A scientific theory of culture and other essays" (1944) and then in other book entitled, "Dynamics of Culture Change" (1945). Malinowski was preoccupied with the study of culture as a whole or totality. He thus introduced a new principle, now called as functionalism. He felt that the need of the time was to examine, explain and analyze as to why and how culture functions, how different aspects of cultures are related into entire culture pattern? The answer to these questions, for Malinowski, can be given on the basis of functionalism. For him, functionalism attempts to explain the parts institutions play within the interrelated whole of a culture. Thus, according to functionalism, institutions of a culture operate to satisfy the needs of the individuals and that of society as a whole. For him, all aspects of culture have a function and they all are interdependent and interrelated. A functional unity among them can be seen in maintaining the existence of human beings on the earth. Thus, culture fulfills the needs of man through cultural

institutions.

Malinowski's chief argument behind functionalism is that every aspect of culture has a function i.e. satisfaction of need. He distinguished three levels of needs (1) Primary (2) institutional (3) Integrative. Primary needs are mostly biological needs such as sex and feeding. The instrumental needs are those institutions such as economic, legal and educational, which help to achieve primary needs. By integrative needs, he means those that help the society to cohere such as religion, magic and play.

Malinowski's functionalism is often termed as individualistic functionalism because of its treatment of social and cultural systems as collective responses to the fundamental biological needs of individuals.

### **1.7 RADCLIFFE-BROWN**

Radcliffe Brown rejected Malinowski's individualistic functionalism and emphasized structured social relationships. Anthropologist, Radcliffe Brown, though is known to have contributed to structural school, was basically a functionalist. He was of views that function as a principle of explanation that itself was not explained. To him, function was more than recognition of reality.

Radcliffe Brown has taken the concept of function from biology. He has compared social life with biological life. Structure of an organism consists of many cells and parts. Which are interdependent and interrelated and perform various activities to maintain the body alive? These activities are functions. The same can be applied to society. The structure of society also comprises network of status and roles which reveal status and functions of individuals. In order to maintain the continuity of the entire social structure, the activities of different social elements or institutions, reveal their social functions. Defining function, Radcliffe-Brown (1952) was of view that function is the contribution, which a partial activity makes to the total activity of which it is a part.

From the discussion of the above thinkers, we can have a look at the salient features of functionalism as follows:

1. Culture is a means for the satisfaction of human needs.
2. Each aspect of culture performs certain functions.
3. It is the social institutions out of the different traits of culture which are the means for the satisfaction of needs.
4. The different traits or aspects of culture though perform different functions, but they are interdependent and interrelated in culture as a totality.
5. Function is the contribution of partial activity to total activity of which it is a part.

Now let us have a look into some of the best-known contemporary theorists, notably Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton who are widely regarded as leading representatives of the functionalist tradition.

## 1.8 TALCOTT PARSONS

The major sociological contribution to functionalist theory may be found in the writings of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Parsons has developed a perspective on society, known as functional imperatives which is often referred to as the equilibrium model. For Parsons, a function is “a complex of activities directed towards meeting a need or needs of the system.” Using this definition, Parsons believes that there are four functional imperatives that are necessary for all systems. In order to survive, a system must perform the following four functions like (1) adaptation (2) goal attainment (3) Integration and (4) latency or pattern maintenance (see box 2 for details)

### Box-1

*“The biological organism is the action system that handles the adaptation function by adjusting to and transforming the external world. The personality system performs the goal attainment function by defining system goal and mobilizing resources to attain them. The social system copes with the integration function by controlling the component parts. Finally, the cultural system performs the latency function by providing actors with the norms and values that motivate them for action.” (Ritzer: 242)*

### **Basic premises and propositions:**

1. To the functionalists, a system is more than the sum of its parts, it is also the relationship among the parts; their primary interest is in the contribution of the elements to the maintenance to the system (or its disintegration).
2. The elements of the system are functionally inter-related. Society, like an organism, is perceived as a system of functionally interrelated components each of which, like an organ, performs a function essential for the survival of the system.
3. Every element of the system has a function which contributes positively to the continued operation of that system or, negatively, toward its disintegration and change. Thus, religion is supposed to relieve the tension in a social group, incest taboo is supposed to regulate sexual access and avoid jealousy and confusion of status; and the prison system is to enforce social control
4. Every system is a well-integrated configuration of elements that constitute an organic whole. In the word of Parsons, 'functionally specialized or differentiated sectors of living system stand in some kind of an order of cybernetically hierarchical control relative to each other.
5. Every society is a relatively persistent structure of elements with built-in mechanisms for self-regulation. Using the principle of homeostasis, Parsons and his associates view society as a self-regulating system, attempting by more or less automatic adjustments to redress the balance of its equilibrium when it is upset by internal or external forces.

The functioning of a social system depends on consensus of its members on common goals and values related to the basic needs of the society. Parsons views the entire social system as resting heavily upon shared values; indeed, the consensual requirements of social system are central to Parsonian functionalism.

According to Parsons, the functional requirements of a social system are adaptation to external situation, instrumental goal-attainment, and integration among units of the system and pattern

maintenance and tension-management.

He classifies the minimum conditions for the stability of a system into three categories: (1) Functional pre-requisites with respect to the individuals must be motivated to participate in socially valued and rewarding activities. (2) Functional pre-requisites with respect to society. There must be a minimum of control over potentially disruptive behaviour and adequate mechanism of social control. (3) Functional pre-requisites with respect to culture. There must be sufficient cultural resources to internalize a level of personality adequate for a social system; minimum conditions necessary for the production, maintenance and development of cultural system in general and of particular types of cultural systems including language, symbols and communication, must be met.

## **1.9 ROBERT K. MERTON**

More than any other sociologist Merton has contributed to the codification and systematization of functional analysis. He reviewed the essential postulates in functional analysis and critiqued and modified them as follows.

### **1. POSTULATE OF THE FUNCTIONAL UNITY OF SOCIETY**

Anthropologists like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown assumed that standard social institutions or commonly shared beliefs and practices are functional for every member of the society. Merton questions the assumption and contends that cultural items do not function uniformly for the society and for all of its members.

Anthropologists have exaggerated the social solidarity, homogeneity and integration of primitive societies. Even if such a conception has merits as a working hypothesis for anthropologists doing field work in fairly static and 'homogeneous' little communities, its application to modern complex societies characterized by functional specialization, structural differentiation and rational bureaucracy, is of doubtful value. Moreover, social integration, or even society for that matter, is no longer given, but a problem to be investigated. Therefore, functional analysis must bring out both positive and negative consequences and specify which elements contribute to what and how.

## **2. POSTULATE OF UNIVERSAL FUNCTIONALISM**

This postulate assumes that ‘all standardized social or cultural forms have positive functions.’ Nineteenth century anthropologists, for instance, assumed that every continuing social pattern or custom must have positive functions contributing to the maintenance of the system and dubbed as ‘survivals’ any patterns whose functions could not be readily identified. Typical is Malinowski’s contention that ‘in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and beliefs fulfills some vital function.’ This assertion is certainly open to debate. What is good for the individual is not necessarily good for the society. A social custom that has positive consequences for the elite may have negative consequences for the masses. Even social institutions which are deliberately created for the betterment of society as a whole may have disastrous consequences at times and under certain circumstances for segment of the society.

## **3. POSTULATE OF INDISPENSABILITY**

The assumption is that if a social pattern is well established, it must be meeting some basic needs of the system, and hence it must be indispensable. It is a double- barreled assumption-certain functions are indispensable for the survival of the social system; and certain social or cultural forms are indispensable for fulfilling these functions. Merton rejects the postulate as formulated and suggests that the same cultural item may perform multiple functions and alternative items may fulfill the same function. The need for government may be met by a ruthless dictator, a liberal democrat or a traditional monarch. If social integration is the function of religion, this function could be served by a strong, centralized government. If salvation is the function served by religion, a simple system of faith would do, and the complexity of numerous religious forms is hard to explain. Therefore, Merton introduces such complementary concepts as ‘functional alternatives,’ functional equivalents or functional substitutes.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1) Who is credited to use Organic analogy and Social Darwinism in relation to Society.**

- a) Malinowski
- b) Durkheim
- c) Herbert Spencer
- d) R.K Merton

**2) What is the name of the first book by Emile Durkheim.**

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**3) (A) Which is not a work by Malinowski.**

- a) A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays
- b) The Dynamics of Culture Change: An Inquiry into Race relations in Africa
- c) The Elementary forms of religious life
- d) Crime and Custom in Savage Society

**(B) What are the three main postulates of Robert K. Merton.**

1. -----

2. -----

Two of the Merton's most significant contributions to functional analysis are subsumed under his discussion of the distinction between manifest and latent functions and between function and dysfunction. Manifest functions are those consequences that are intended and recognized by the participants in the system of action concerned, and latent functions are those consequences neither intended nor recognized by participants. Function (function is the word of Levy) is any activity or usage that contributes to the adaptation or adjustment of the unit to its setting and dysfunction is any activity that lessens the adaptation or adjustment of the unit to its setting. These distinctions and Merton's clarification of them have made functional analysis of cultural patterns and social institutions both meaningful and scientific.

### **1.10 CRITICAL EVALUATION**

One of the major criticisms that functionalism faces is that it is teleological. Function is often equated with purpose and the existence of any social form or cultural usage is readily attributed to its function.

Functionalism is criticized for equating function with purpose or because which leads to other misleading assumptions as well. If children in India are polite and submissive to elders, it is certainly a function of child-rearing and socialization. But can we then say that child rearing and socialization were created to make children polite and submissive? This line of reasoning is no different from the argument that prisons were created to keep people out of prisons.

Another major difficulty associated with functional analysis is the vagueness of the concepts like function, consensus and integration which are used inconsistently and often without clear definition. Although Merton has done much to clarify the most important concepts, the terminological confusion still persists.

Finally, functionalism also faces the criticism that it has consistently underplayed conflict and

structural strain. They overstress integration and consensus, overlooking conflict, especially contradictions inherent in social structure.

### **1.11 LET US SUM UP**

Functionalism is a sociological perspective that views society as a complex system where interrelated parts, such as institutions, work together to promote stability and solidarity. Using a macro-level approach, it applies a biological or "organic" analogy, comparing society to a human body where each part (like family, education, and government) performs specific functions necessary for the whole system's survival and health. Key thinkers like Emile Durkheim and Herbert Spencer emphasized that social phenomena serve purposes and contribute to a cohesive social order.

A social system is a complex, structured network of interacting individuals, groups, and institutions that form a coherent whole, characterized by shared norms, values, and symbols. Defined by sociologist Talcott Parsons, it encompasses family, community, or even entire societies, where members perform roles within a shared structure to meet collective goals. Key components include beliefs, sentiments, goals, norms, status, roles, power, and facilities, which contribute to the system's functioning, integration, and adaptation to its environment.

Emile Durkheim's work, focused on the division of labour and social solidarity, leading to the groundwork for functionalism by examining how social institutions contribute to social cohesion. Parsons viewed social institutions as stabilizing forces that maintain social order whereas Merton refined functional analysis by introducing the concepts of latent functions and dysfunctions, providing a more nuanced and critical framework for understanding social phenomena.

### **1.12 GLOSSARY**

1. The term function in sociological sense means the part played by a unit within the context of a larger whole.
2. The postulate of universal functionalism assumes that all standardized social or cultural forms have positive functions.

### **1.13 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

Q1. Define functionalism and give its meaning.

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Q2. What has been the contribution of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown to the development of functionalism.

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Q3. Trace the historical roots of functionalism.

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Q4. Briefly describe the basic premises and propositions of functionalism.

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Q5. Explain briefly Robert Merton's concepts of 'latent and manifest functions' and 'function and dysfunction'.

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Q6. What are the main criticisms faced by functionalism.

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#### 1.14 LESSON END EXERCISE

1. ----- is the founding father of Sociology.

2. Match the following:

**Thinkers**

- a) Emile Durkheim
- b) Malinowski
- c) Radcliffe Brown
- d) Talcott Parsons

**Books**

- 1) Structure and function in primitive society
- 2) The Division of Labour in society
- 3) Magic, science, and religion
- 4) The social system

- a) a-3, b-2, c-1, d-4
- b) a-4, b-1, c-2, d-3
- c) a-3, b-2, c-1, d-4
- d) a-2, b-3, c-1, d-4

3. What are manifest functions according to Talcott Parsons.
- 
- 

**Answer: 1. Auguste Comte, 2- D 3-** Manifest functions in sociology are the recognized, intended, and conscious consequences of social patterns, institutions, or actions. These outcomes are openly acknowledged, expected, and generally positive, designed to help a social system function. Examples include education providing knowledge or laws maintaining public order.

### 1.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. H. Blumer (1969), *Interactionism, Perspective and Method*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall.
2. H. Blumer (1962), "Society and Symbolic Interaction, in *Human Behaviour and Social Process*, ed. Arnold M. Rose, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.
3. Abraham, M. Francis (1982), *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. Kinloch, Graham .C (1977), *Sociological Theory: Its Development and Major Paradigms*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
5. Charles W. Morris (ed.) (1962) *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Chicago: Chicago University of Chicago Press.
6. Lemert, Charles (ed.), (1993), *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*, Oxford: Westview press.
7. Shibutani, Tamotsu (1961), *Society and Personality: An Interactionist Approach to Social Psychology*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

## **1.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-c, 2-The Division of Labour, 3a-c**

**STRUCTURE**

**2.0 Learning Objectives**

**2.1 Introduction**

**2.2 Meaning Of Function**

**2.3 Theory Of Culture**

**2.4 Cultural Functionalism**

**2.5 The Theory of Needs**

**2.5.1 The Biological Foundations of Culture: The Human nature**

**2.5.2 The Derivation of Cultural Needs**

**2.5.3 Basic Needs and Cultural Responses**

**2.5.4 The Nature of Derived Needs**

**2.6 Criticism**

**2.7 Let us Sum Up**

**2.8 Glossary**

**2.9 Self-Assessment Questions**

**2.10 Lesson End Exercise**

**2.11 Suggested Readings**

**2.12 Answers to check your progress**

## **2.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- **Understand the concept of function;**
- **Understand about the culture propounded in Anthropological tradition; and**
- **Learn about Malinowski's contribution to culture functionalism.**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Bronislaw Kaspar Malinowski (1884-1942), with his Ph. D degree of physics and mathematics, was attracted to anthropology through the reading of James Frazer's "The Golden Bough". Later he became a post-graduate student at the London School of Economics from which he obtained his D.Sc. degree in 1916.

An erudite and well-read scholar, Malinowski was aware of the writings of Emile Durkheim, but he chose to ally his understanding of function to field work research. In his thoughts about this matter, function was a specific way of understanding institutions and customs of primitive life. In his famous essay, "Magic, Science and Religion (1925) he explained these institutions having the function of largely fulfilling psychological needs. He stated that "Magic was the standardization of optimism, serving to provide man with necessary confidence to carry out his important tasks.

### **Major Contributions:**

- 1. Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922)**
- 2. Crime and Custom in Savage Society (1926)**
- 3. Sex and Repression in Savage Society (1927)**
- 4. The Sexual Life of the Savages (1929)**
- 5. Coral Gardens and their Magic (1935)**
- 6. Magic Science and Religion (1948)**

Recognition of the concept of function as a theoretical tool and hence functionalism as a school of thought very generally has been regarded as a British attribute. Malinowski was of opinion that a cultural trait, which is functionless, would not survive and hence no cultural survival. One trait of culture is integrated with another and, thus, if one trait is disturbed, it paralyses the other.

## **2.2 MEANING OF FUNCTION**

The basic meaning of function is activity or operation. For instance, the proper function of a room is to sleep or to accommodate a particular set of things, individuals etc. Malinowski was thus of opinion that everything has a function. While interpreting culture he pointed out that culture components have function to perform.

In the previous lesson, you were told, in brief, about Malinowski's view on functionalism. In this lesson Malinowski's contribution is discussed in detail. To understand functionalism, you are supposed to know the theory and functional analysis of culture and also theory of needs of Malinowski who made a clear-cut use of functional approach in the analysis of culture. In his book, "A scientific theory of culture and other essays (1944) and then in another book entitled, "Dynamics of cultural change" (1945), Malinowski was preoccupied with the study of culture as a whole or totality. He felt that it is necessary to examine, explain and analyze as to why and how culture functions, how different aspects of cultures are related into entire cultural pattern? For him, functionalism attempts to explain the part the institutions play within the interrelated whole of a culture.

## **2.3 THEORY OF CULTURE**

One of the basic contributions of Malinowski was his concept of culture. He defined culture (1931) as comprising inherited artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values." For him social organization is also a part of culture. Malinowski's use of the term culture has a number of propositions.

1. He treated the concept of culture as the tribal microcosm, the functioning whole.
2. With the above assumptions, he emphasized on the need to study the use or function of the

customs, institutions and beliefs, which formed part of each culture.

3. Malinowski was preoccupied with the difference between Man's biological and sociological heritage and he identified the latter with the terms culture

Malinowski had the firm belief that a cultural trait or characteristic, which is functionless would not survive. So, a cultural trait should not be studied in isolation. Since one trait is related to another trait in a society, it requires to be studied in an integrated manner. This is Malinowski's integrational theory. However, he emphasized on the study of specific culture as an integrated whole. By integrated whole he meant that the various aspects of a culture are related to each other and integrated just like a machine. Malinowski explained it through the example of a motor car in which various parts of a car are related and failure of one part would paralyze the whole car. Similarly, different parts or traits of culture are integrated in such a manner that the failure of one would lead to change in the whole culture. This type of integration, he meant as the interdependence of parts.

While studying culture, Malinowski was more interested in people's own conception of their history than their actual history. The anthropological significance of the tribal people's myths and legends in maintaining their system of clan structure, their land tenure, and their magic are of functional importance. The significance of a people's own view of their past, the genealogies they invent, to account for their political institutions, or migration tales which act as charters e.g. the aims of purpose of the society. The first aim of every society according to Malinowski is its survival. This functional concept of cultural history was akin to Malinowski's analysis of function of a culture. This he did while teaching to his students on functioning of primitive myth.

In his book, scientific theory of culture, Malinowski defined culture as the integral whole consisting of implements and consumer's good, of Constitutional Charters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and craft, beliefs and customs but in simple primitive culture or the complex (civilized) culture, we are confronted by a vast apparatus, partly material, partly human and partly spiritual, by which man is able to cope with the concrete specific problem that face him. These problems arise out of the fact that man has a body subject to various organic needs and he

lives in an environment which is his best friend. This environment provides the raw material of man's handiwork and also his dangerous enemy.

From the above definition of culture, you must have noticed that man has organic needs which are to be satisfied for his survival. Thus, it appears that the satisfaction of organic or basic needs of man and of the race is a minimum set of conditions imposed on each culture. The problem set by man's nutritive, reproductive, and hygienic needs must be solved. They are solved by the construction of a new, secondary or artificial environment. This environment is to be permanently reproduced, maintained and managed. This creates a new standard of living which depends upon the cultural level of the community, on the environment and on the efficiency of the group. A cultural standard of living means appearance of new needs, and new imperatives or determinants. Thus, cultural traditions are to be transmitted from each generation to the next. This may include: -

- Methods and mechanism of education
- Maintenance of law and order for co-operation,
- Arrangement for sanctioning of customs, ethics, and law

Also, further the material substratum of culture has to be renewed and maintained through some forms of economic organization. For your convenience, the above discussion may be presented in the following simplified manner.

1. Man has first and foremost his organic or basic needs to be satisfied for survival; and for this.
2. Man has to create arrangements and carrying out activities for feeding, housing, clothing etc. to protect himself from external enemies and dangers physical, animal or human.
3. These primary problems of man are solved by artifacts, organization into co-operative groups and also by the development of knowledge, or sense of value and ethics.

Thus, a theory can be established in which the basic needs and their cultural satisfaction can

be linked up with derivation of new cultural needs which impose upon man and society a secondary type of determinism (imperatives). Two types of such imperatives have been discussed by Malinowski.

1. Instrumental imperatives arising out of such types of activities as economic, normative, educational and political and
2. Integrative imperatives arising out of knowledge, religion and magic. For your understanding we may go to little further detail: -

Culture for Malinowski has biological survival value. Its adaptive character is in part due to the fact that provides primary needs are shared with other animals. However, the conditions of man's life as a social animal also impose a "secondary determinism". This Malinowski has defined in terms of "derived needs or imperatives these relate to the requirements of maintenance of cultural apparatus, regulation of human behaviour, socialization and exercise of authority etc. For Malinowski the responses to them comprise those of economic, social control, education, political organization etc.

Malinowski was of opinion that in social life it is essentially the habit that becomes transmuted into custom, parental care into deliberate training of the rising generation and impulses into values. He calls it "integrative imperatives". Thus, the biological determinants of culture activities are emphasized at all levels by needs (primary, derived and integrative needs)

Having observed the aspects of culture, they must now be subjected to functional analysis. This Malinowski viewed in terms of their utility towards fulfilling the needs of the members of the society. His conceptual perspective was built around the assumption that cultural items exist to fulfill the basic human needs. The functional view of culture insists, therefore, upon the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom, material objectives, idea and belief fulfills some vital functions i.e. has some tasks to accomplish and represents an indispensable part within the working whole. For further explanation, you can read the contribution made by Malinowski through his fieldwork among

primitive societies. See the examples cited in Box 'A' to substantiate the point.

#### **BOX-A**

**In Malinowski's thought, function was a specific way of understanding institutions and customs of primitive life. In his famous book, "Magic science and Religion (1929) he saw function as largely fulfilling the psychological need. Magic was the standardization of optimism serving to provide man with necessary confidence to carry out his important task to maintain his poise, and his mental integrity in fits of anger, in throes of late, of unrequired love, of despair and anxiety. Religion also opened up escapes from emotional stress. Religion also makes social contributions because it assists in maintenance of moral law and order and works towards the identification of whole tribe as a social unit. Optimism and confidence enabled Trobriander's (a primitive tribe) to become better food providers and magic thus contributed to physical survival. This notion of function as serving biological needs become the core of Malinowski's functional theory. In his book, "A scientific theory of culture (1944)", here iterated his conviction that the functional method of investigation is best suited to give and accurate picture of the realities of culture.**

#### **2.4 CULTURAL FUNCTIONALISM**

In functional approach Malinowski believed, it is the job of researcher to discover the specific functions of the element of culture with in the integrated scheme. Functional analysis of culture reveals that it is the handiwork of man and as the medium through which he achieves his end i.e. a medium which allows him to live, to establish standard of safety, comfort and prosperity, a medium which gives him power and allows him to create goods and values beyond his animal, organic endowment. This culture, in all this and through all this, must be understood as a means to end i.e. instrumentally or functionally.

In order to fulfill his various needs, man has established certain general type of organization, found in every culture all over the universe. The universal institutional types as principles of integration may be depicted as follows.

<b>Principles of Integration</b>	<b>Types of Institutions</b>
1. Reproduction (Bonds of blood defined by legal contract of marriage, principles of descent.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family (domestic group)</li> <li>- Courtship organization (marriage)</li> <li>- Groups of kindred</li> <li>- The clan – matrilineal or patrilineal</li> </ul>
2. Territorial (community of interests due to propinquity, contiguity and possibility of cooperation)	<p>The neighborhood group of municipalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- city, district, province, tribe</li> </ul>
3. Physiological (Distinction due to sex, age, and so on)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primitive sex totemic groups</li> <li>- Age groups and Age grades</li> </ul>
4. Voluntary Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primitive secret societies</li> <li>- At higher levels, clubs mutual aid and benefit societies.</li> </ul>
5. Occupational and Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primitive - magicians, sorcerers, Shamans, Priests.</li> <li>- Civilization - professional workers guilds</li> </ul>
	-

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schools, colleges, police, defense courts, universities.</li> </ul>
6. Rank and status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Estates, and order of nobility clergy, burghers, peasants, serfs, slaves, the caste system.</li> </ul>
7. Comprehensive (integration by community of culture or by political power)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tribe as a unit.</li> <li>- nationality</li> <li>- cultural sub groups (minorities, the ghetto, gypsies</li> <li>- political unit</li> </ul>

Malinowski illustrated his functional scheme with a charter of an institution.

He defined charter of an institution as a system of values for the pursuit of which human beings get organized. All institutions, he felt have certain universal properties or elements that can be listed and then used as dimensions for comparing different institutions.

**1. Personnel: He defined personnel of an institution as the group political, legal and educational activity.**

As regard the type of activity, culture can be analyzed into a number of aspects such as education, social control, and economic system of knowledge, belief and morality and also modes of creative and artistic expression.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. Who said “Magic was the standardization of optimism, serving to provide man with necessary confidence to carry out his important tasks.**

- a) Malinowski
- b) Emile Durkheim
- c) Herbert Spencer
- d) R. K Merton

**2. The conceptual perspective of Malinowski was built around the assumption that cultural items exist to fulfill the basic human needs (True or False).**

**3. The three types of needs discussed by Malinowski are:**

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**2.5 THE THEORY OF NEEDS**

**2.5.1 The Biological Foundations of Culture: The Human Nature**

The theory of culture is based on the fact that all human beings belong to an animal species. Man as an organism must exist under conditions which not only secure survival, but also allow of healthy and normal metabolism. No culture can continue if the group is not replenished continually and normally. Otherwise, obviously, the culture will perish through the progressive dying out of the group. Certain minimum conditions are thus imposed on all groups of human beings, and on all individual organisms within the group. We can define the term "human nature" by the fact that all men must eat, they must breathe, to sleep, to procreate, and to eliminate waste matter from their organisms wherever they live and whatever type of civilization they practice.

By human nature, therefore, we mean the biological determinism which imposes on every civilization and on all individuals in it the carrying out of such bodily functions as breathing, sleep, rest, nutrition, excretion, and reproduction. We can define the concept of basic needs as the environmental and biological conditions which must be fulfilled for the survival of the individual and the group. Indeed, the survival of both requires the maintenance of a minimum of health and vital energy necessary for the performance of cultural tasks.

We have already indicated that the concept of need is merely the first approach to the understanding of organized human behavior. It has been several times suggested that not even the simplest need, nor yet the physiological function most independent of environmental influences, can be regarded as completely unaffected by culture. Nevertheless, there are certain activities determined biologically, by the physics of the environment and by human anatomy, which are invariably incorporated in each type of civilization.

This can be presented in a diagrammatic form. In the adjoining table a series of vital sequences are listed. Each of them has been analyzed into a tripartite chain of phases. There is an impulse which is primarily determined by the physiological state of the organism. We find there, for instance, a state of the organism which would occur if breathing were temporarily prevented. We all know what this feeling is from personal experience. The physiologist can define it in terms of biochemical processes in the tissues, in terms of the function of circulation, the construction of the lungs, and the processes of oxidation and carbon monoxide.

The impulse or appetite connected with digestive processes can also be stated in terms of human psychology formulated by introspection or personal experience. Objectively, however, this can be referred for its scientific statement to the physiologist, more specifically to the dietitian and specialist in digestive processes. A textbook on the physiology of sex can define the appetite of this instinct by reference to human anatomy and the physiology of reproduction. The same obviously refers to fatigue, which is an impulse to stop, for the time being, muscular and nervous activity; to bladder and colon pressure, and perhaps to drowsiness, to the impulse to move, to exercise muscles and nerves, and the impulse to avoid direct organic dangers, such as impact or falling down a precipice or a height. The avoidance of pain is perhaps a general impulse related to the avoidance of danger.

**PERMANENT VITAL SEQUENCES INCORPORATED IN ALL CULTURES**

<b>IMPULSE</b>	<b>ACT</b>	<b>SATISFACTION</b>
Drive to breath, gasping for air	Intake of oxygen	Elimination of Carbon dioxide in tissues
Hunger	Ingestion of Food	Satiation
Thirst	Absorption of liquid	Quenches
Sex Appetite	Conjugation	Detumescence
Fatigue	Rest	Restoration of muscular and nervous energy
Restlessness	Activity	Satisfaction of Fatigue
Somnolence/Sleepiness	Sleep	Awakening with restored energy
Bladder Pressure	Micturition	Removal of tension
Colon Pressure	Defecation	Abdominal relaxation
Fright	Escape from danger	Relaxation
Pain	Avoidance by effective Act	Return to normal state

In the second column we list the physiological performance corresponding to each impulse. This perhaps is the least variable in the series as regards any cultural influences or motivation. The actual intake of air or food; the act of conjugation; sleep, rest, micturition, or defecation, are phenomena which can be described in terms of anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, and physics. More correctly, perhaps, we might say that a minimum definition in objective anatomical and physiological terms can be given for each process, although even here certain cultural modifications occur. In the last column we list the end-results of physiological activities, in their relationship to the original impulse.

Here, once more, we find that, through the activities listed in the middle column, a change occurs in the human body, producing very definite conditions in the tissues which introspectively are felt as easing up, relief, satisfaction. In terms of observable behavior, we would have to

define them as organic quiescence, as a return to the normal chronic activities, as in breathing, or the resumption of other tasks as in the case of evacuation.

It has to be noted, however, that here conjugation, that is, the essential performance of the instinct, and the temporary quiescence of both organisms concerned, is under certain conditions only the starting point of another biological process of primary importance. Effective conjugation engenders the process of pregnancy in one of the two organisms. Here we have a complex biological sequence of events, in which a new organism comes into being, at first within the maternal body, later separating in the act of birth and starting a partly independent career of ontogenic development. The process of growth, intrauterine and later individual, also is a biological fact associated with a variety of impulses and needs, and must be listed as a biological determinant of culture. Here, however, we cannot place growth under the heading of impulse, although growth implies a series of additional impulses, especially in infancy, and is related to the appearance of certain impulses at different stages of development.

### **2.5.2 The Derivation of Cultural Needs**

So far, we have learned that human nature imposes on all forms of behavior, however complex and highly organized, a certain determinism. This consists of a number of vital sequences, indispensable to the healthy run of the organism and to the community, which must be incorporated in each traditional system of organized behavior. These vital sequences constitute crystallizing points for a number of cultural processes, products, and complex arrangements which are built around each sequence. We were also about to see that the concepts of form and function have already been defined with reference to a vital sequence as a mere organic performance.

Let us now consider how impulses, activities, and satisfactions actually occur within a cultural setting. As for the impulse, it is clear that in every human society each impulse is remolded by tradition. It appears still in its dynamic form as a drive, but a drive modified, shaped, and determined by tradition. In the case of breathing, this occurs within enclosed spaces, a house, a cave, a mine, or a factory. We could say that there is a compromise between the need for oxygen in the lungs and the need for integral protection during sleep, work, or social gathering.

The requirements of temperature and of ventilation have to be met by cultural devices. In this a certain traditional adjustment or habituation of the organism takes place. It is a well-known fact that even in European cultures, the emphasis on fresh air as against level of temperature is not identical in England, Germany, Italy and Russia. Another complication in this simple impulse of air intake to fill the lungs with oxygen is due to the fact that the organs of breathing are also, to a large extent, organs of speech.

A compromise, an adjustment of deep breathing to performances in public oratory, the recital of magical formulae, and singing, constitutes another domain in which cultural breathing differs from the mere physiological act. The interaction between beliefs, magical, religious, and connected with etiquette, and breathing, would supply another co-determinant to that of physiology in cultures where the exhalation of breath, especially at close quarters, is regarded as dangerous, impolite, or noxious, while the deep, noisy intake of breath is a sign of respect or submission.

Cultural determination is a familiar fact as regards hunger or appetite, in short, the readiness to eat. Limitations of what is regarded as palatable, admissible, ethical; the magical, religious, hygienic and social taboos on quality, raw material, and preparation of food; the habitual routine establishing the time and the type of appetite—all these could be exemplified from our own civilization, from the rules and principles of Judaism or Islam, Brahminism or Shintoism, as well as from every primitive culture. The sex appetite, persistent and invariably allowed within limitations, is also hedged round by the strictest prohibitions, as in incest, temporary abstinences, and vows of chastity, temporary or permanent.

Celibacy obviously eliminates—at least as an ideal demand—the sexual relations from certain minorities within a culture. As a permanent rule, it clearly never occurs for a community. The specific form in which the sexual impulse is allowed to occur is deeply modified by anatomical inroads (circumcision, infibulation, clitoridectomy, breast, foot, and face lacerations); the attractiveness of a sex object is affected by economic status and rank; and the integration of the sex impulse involves the personal desirability of a mate as an individual and as a member of the group. It would be equally easy to show that fatigue, somnolence, thirst, and restlessness are determined by such cultural factors as a call to duty, the urgency of a task, the established

rhythm of activities. Similar factors obviously also affect bladder and colon pressure and impulses of pain and fear.

As for pain, indeed, it would seem that most of the elementary invariants of cultural history and ethnographic data prove that resistance and endurance can be almost indefinitely increased by changes in the central system achieved through religious enthusiasm, the heroism of a patriot, or the model determination of a Puritan. In short, it would be idle to disregard the fact that the impulse leading to the simplest physiological performance is as highly plastic and determined by tradition as it is ineluctable in the long run, because it is determined by physiological necessities. We see also why simple physiological impulses cannot exist under conditions of culture.

Breathing has somehow to be combined with vocal performances, with confinement within the same space of several people, and activities in which air is affected by noxious or poisonous gases. Eating, under conditions of culture, is not the mere resort to environmental supplies, but something in which human beings partake of prepared food which, as a rule, has been for some time accumulated and stored, and which invariably is the result of an organized differential activity of a group, even when this occurs in the simplest form of collecting. Eating in common implies conditions as to quantity, habit, and manner, and thus derives a number of rules of commensalism. Conjugation in the human species is not an act to be performed anywhere, anyhow, without consideration of the feelings or reactions of others.

Conjugation in public is, in fact, extremely rare, and occurs either as a direct deviation from the norms of the society as a form of sexual perversion, or, very rarely, as a part of a complex magical or mystical ceremony. In such cases, it becomes rather the cultural use of a physiological fact than a biologically determined satisfaction of a mere impulse. The act of resting, sleep, of muscular or nervous activity, and the satisfaction of restlessness, invariably demand a specific setting, a physical apparatus of objects, and special conditions arranged and allowed for by the community. In the simplest, as well as in highly complex civilizations, micturition and defecation are performed under very special conditions and are surrounded by a rigid system of rules. Many primitives, for reasons of magic and in fear of sorcery, as well as because of their ideas of dangers emanating from human excreta, impose stricter rules of privacy and isolation than we find even in civilized Europe. In all this, we are showing how the very act,

that is, the core of a vital sequence, is also regulated, defined, and thus modified by culture. The same refers, obviously, to the third phase in a vital sequence, that of satisfaction. This, once more, cannot be defined merely in terms of physiology, although physiology supplies us with the minimum definition.

Satiety is undoubtedly a condition of the human organism. But an Australian aborigine who had by mistake satisfied his hunger by eating his totemic animal, an orthodox Jew who, through a mishap, had eaten pork to satiety, a Brahmin forced to eat the flesh of a cow, would one and all develop symptoms of a physiological nature, vomiting, digestive disturbances, symptoms of the illness specifically believed to be the sanction in the case of breach. The satisfaction reached by a sexual act in which the incest taboo is broken or adultery committed or the sacred vows of chastity defied produces once more an organic effect determined by cultural values. This proves that in cultural behavior we must not forget biology, but we cannot rest satisfied with biological determinism alone.

In regard to breathing, we might mention the very widespread belief in "evil effluvia," or dangerous atmosphere, typified in the Italian expression *mal aria*, which refers, as a rule, not to actually dangerous volatile substances, but to culturally determined categories, which produce, nevertheless, pathological results. We see, therefore, that the bald, merely physiological consideration embodied in our table of vital sequences is a necessary point of departure, but it is not sufficient when we consider the way in which man satisfies his bodily urges under cultural conditions. In the first place, it is clear that, taking an organized human group as a whole, a culture and the people who exercise it conjointly, we have to consider each vital sequence with reference to the individual, the organized group, the traditional values, norms, and beliefs, and also the artificial environment in which most of the urges are satisfied.

The concept of drive is better omitted from any analysis of human behavior, unless, that is, we understand that we have to use it differently from the animal psychologists or physiologists. Since a conceptual differentiation is always best terminologically differentiated, we shall speak henceforth of motive, meaning by this the urge as it actually is found in operation within a given culture. We have, however, to reformulate our concept of that physiological minimum, the limits within which physiological motivations can be refashioned so that they still do not force organic

degeneration or depopulation upon the members of a culture. As opposed to motive, therefore, we speak of needs.

This term we shall predicate not with reference to an individual organism, but rather for the community and its culture as a whole. By need, then, we understand the system of conditions in the human organism, in the cultural setting, and in the relation of both to the natural environment, which are sufficient and necessary for the survival of group and organism. A need, therefore, is the limiting set of facts. Habits and their motivations, the learned responses and the foundations of organization, must be so arranged as to allow the basic needs to be satisfied. The concept, however, will emerge more clearly when we discuss it directly and concretely, and construct a table of needs which only indirectly corresponds to our table of impulses.

### 2.5.3 BASIC NEEDS AND CULTURAL RESPONSES

The following table of basic needs and cultural responses has been drafted with a view to simplicity. Its wording verges on triteness. Since it is, however, only a synoptic device, we shall describe each entry more fully, thus providing a definition for each of the shorthand labels.

Basic Needs	Cultural Responses
Metabolism	Commissariat
Reproduction	Kinship
Bodily Comforts	Shelter
Safety	Protection
Movement	Activities
Growth	Training
Health	Hygiene

Thus, the entry *metabolism* means that the processes of food intake, digestion, the collateral secretions, the absorption of nutritive substances, and rejection of waste matter are related in several ways to environmental factors and the interaction between the organism and the outside world, an

interaction culturally framed. We have, thus, condensed here the several drives which were separately stated in our previous table.

The supply of solid foods, of liquids, and of oxygen is all determined by the metabolic processes, and so are the processes of excretion, in which the individual once more resorts to the environment. In this context, moreover, we do not refer so much fit the drive of hunger, the impulse of air intake, or the feeling of thirst. What we are concerned with here is that, as regards the community as a whole, every organism in general requires certain conditions which guarantee the supply of physical material, the conditions in which the digestive processes can be carried out and the sanitary arrangements of the end-processes.

Similarly, when we come to *reproduction*, we are not concerned with the individual drive or impulse of sex, and its realization in some particular case. Here we are stating simply that reproduction must go on in a numerically sufficiently extensive manner to replenish the numbers of the community.

The brief statement *bodily comforts* refer to the range of temperature, percentage of humidity, and absence of noxious matters in contact with the body, which allow such physiological processes as circulation, digestion, internal secretions, and metabolism to continue in the purely physical sense. Probably the range of temperature is the most significant element, since exposure to wind and weather, to rain, snow, or continuous dampness acts mostly through elements of temperature upon an organism.

*Safety* refers to the prevention of bodily injuries by mechanical accident, attack from animals or other human beings. Here it is clear that, in terms of drive, we were interested, in our previous discussion, in approximate individual types of behavior reaction to danger or to pain: Here we are putting on record that under conditions where most organisms are not protected from bodily injury the culture and its group will not survive.

The movement predicates here that activity is as necessary to the organism as it is indispensable to culture. The difference between our previous treatment of muscular and nervous impulse and the definition of the need, as it here appears, is clear. Here we are concerned with the general conditions under which a group of people live and cooperate, and under which most

members at any time, and all members at some time, have to obtain some scope for exercise and initiative. The entry growth, which was discussed in our list of impulses, but could not be placed there, has here a legitimate position. It declares that since human beings are dependent in infancy, since maturation is a slow and gradual process, and since old age, in man more than any other animal species, leaves the individual defenseless, the facts of growing up, maturity, and decay impose certain general but very definite conditions on culture/ In other words, no group could survive nor its culture endure if the infant, immediately after birth, were left to its own devices, as is the case in many animal species.

Finally, we have added here *health* as a general biological need. Whether this entry can be maintained, however, is doubtful. Obviously, health refers to all the other entries, with the exclusion, perhaps, of the second, and even there the protection of reproductive processes from possible external dangers is part of a hygienic procedure. Indeed, if we defined health in general and positive terms, it would amount to the maintenance of the organism in normal conditions as regards its fitness for the indispensable output of energy. The only justification for making a separate entry would refer to health insofar as it is impaired and has to be regained. Since all our entries are positive, "sickness" would not be appropriate, since sickness is not a need biologically determined by its obverse. Our entry, if it reads "relief or removal of sickness or of pathological conditions is probably justified, insofar as this imposes certain limiting conditions on human societies, and elicits certain organized responses.

We are also interested in the way in which the various cultural responses are constructed. Here we shall see that these responses are by no means simple. In order to provide the constant flow of nutritive goods, articles, dress, building materials, structures, weapons, and tools, human cultures have not merely to produce artifacts, but have also to develop techniques, that is, regulated bodily movements, values, and forms of social organization. It will be best, probably, to discuss, one after the other, the various cultural responses listed in the second column, and see what they look like in details of organization and cultural structure.

**1.COMMISSARIAT:** Starting here with the direct satisfaction of the nutritive need, we would find that human beings eat and drink not by direct resort to nature, nor yet in isolation, nor yet in terms of mere anatomical or physiological performance. People often eat together on a common

mat or a piece of ground reserved for that purpose, round a fireplace, round a table, or at a bar. In all this we would find that the food had already been prepared, that is, selected, cooked, roasted, and seasoned. Some physical apparatus for eating is used, table manners observed, and the social conditions of the act carefully defined. It would be possible, indeed, to show that in every human society and as regards any individual in any society the act of eating happens within a definite institution: it may be the household, a commercial eating establishment, or a hostel. It always is a fixed place, with an organization for the supply of food or its preparation, and for the opportunities of consuming it.

**2. KINSHIP:** Under this brief label we have condensed the procreative processes which, in human cultures, correspond to the brief pairing and reproductive phases in animal life. The main distinction between human and animal mating is, no doubt, biologically determined, as is the need of reproduction itself. The human infant needs parental protection for a much longer period than does the young of even the highest anthropoid apes. Hence, no culture could endure in which the act of reproduction, that is, mating, pregnancy, and childbirth, was not linked up with the fact of legally-founded parenthood, that is, a relationship in which the father and the mother have to look after the children for a long period, and, in turn, derive certain benefits for the care and trouble taken.

With the process of pregnancy and childbirth, marriage is transformed into parenthood. Here, once more, the process never remains purely physiological or private. Invariably a set of rules of behavior becomes incumbent on the pregnant woman and her husband. They usually are sanctioned by beliefs referring to the welfare of the forth coming new organism, and since the whole community, especially the kinsmen and kinswomen, are interested in the fact of birth and in the addition to their numbers, the proleptic customs and ethics of pregnancy and early stages of parenthood are a matter of public concern.

**3.SHELTER** as response to *bodily comforts* Were we to think of the simple physical factors used by human beings to insure the optimum of bodily temperature, as in the use of clothing, fire, and enclosed spaces; or of bodily cleanliness, as in ablution with water, remote and secluded places for excretion, or the more complex chemical solvents, such as alkaline substances—we would probably be somewhat at a loss to find, under this heading, new institutionalized

responses. Yet here, once more, we only need to remember that human beings do not look for shelter in a haphazard manner when a squall of wind carries a shower, when the temperature suddenly rises or falls, or when a man, drenched by immersion in water or by rain, wishes to warm himself in a cave or a house. Nor do primitive or sophisticated human beings snatch up a fur, a skin, a fabric, when they need protection. All such physical commodities are used as a routine part of organized life. Shelter, warmth, arrangements for cleanliness, may be found within the household.

Clothing, however elementary or complex, is produced, under closest household economy, within the domestic group; or in a community where a division of functions exists, by organized workshops or factories. Sanitary institutions may be private or public, and thus part of the household or an integral public element within a municipality, local group, or a horde. Everywhere we would find that we have to inquire into organized production, into the incorporation of certain material objects within an institution, into the rules of decency, cleanliness, ownership, and magico-religious taboos; into the type of training carried on by an organized group, in which such habits are implanted and maintained. And as everywhere else, we would find here that, since we deal with behavior in which social and traditional regulation aims at curbing, or at least at modifying and standardizing of natural impulse, and laws of property impose a limitation of use, some authority must be there to impose sanctions, punish breach, and thus maintain order and the smooth running of organized behavior.

**4. PROTECTION:** The organization of defense against natural danger or cataclysm, against animal attack or human Violence, obviously involves such institutions as the household, the municipality, the clan, the age-grade, and the tribe. Here two important considerations enter. Protection very often consists in the exercise of foresight and in planning. The construction of houses on piles, planted either on solid ground or in a shallow lagoon or in a lake; the erection of palisades or walls; the very selection of the site so as to avoid the danger of a tidal wave, a volcanic eruption, or an earthquake—all such anticipatory protection would have to be correlated with the biological need of safety, and its cultural responses of protections Here, once more, the economic factor in the organized, technically planned, and cooperatively executed principles of selection, construction, and maintenance enters clearly and definitely. Rules of technique, their

translation into laws of behavior, of property, of authority, are clear. Training means that the growing generation has to be prepared, enlightened, and advised.

**5. ACTIVITIES:** The human organism, normal and rested, needs movement. This is a very general imperative imposed by human nature upon civilization. The satisfaction of this need is, on the one hand, essentially determined by the fact that without muscular action and a definite orientation of the nervous system, man achieves nothing. Thus, the systems of bodily activities connected with economics, political organization, exploration of the environment, contact with other communities, are one and all related to individual muscular tensions and their surplus of nervous energy. On the other hand, they are all instrumental, that is, directed towards the satisfaction of other needs. Hence, they are organized, that is, they can be described, submitted to theoretical analysis, and compared only in terms of institutions.

**6. GROWTH:** This entry indicates that a full cultural analysis in descriptive terms, or as part of a scientific theory, must project the whole gamut of cultural processes and products onto the life history of a representative individual or, where there is a substantial difference as regards class, caste, or status, of a number of representative individuals. Most ethnographic records give a description of various phases such as infancy, childhood, maturity, and old age. The scientific point of view, however, would insist on dealing not so much with the generalized description of each phase, but rather with the manner in which the individual is gradually trained in skills, taught to use language and other symbolic devices of his culture, made to enter the ever-widening set of institutions of which he will become a full member when he reaches full maturity and assumes his share of tribal citizenship.

**7. HYGIENE:** As regards to this problem, we would first have to link it up with all that refers to organic welfare in the other entries. Thus, sanitary arrangements might be analyzed here from the point of view of native beliefs as to health and medical dangers. Besides such considerations, the ethnographer would have to register here the minimum of elementary common sense, rules about exposure, extreme fatigue, the avoidance of dangers, of accidents, as well as the limited but never absent range of household remedies. In most primitive cultures, however, this aspect of cultural response is primarily dominated by beliefs in witchcraft or sorcery, that is, the magical power of certain people or agencies to inflict bodily harm upon man.

#### 2.5.4 The Nature of Derived Needs

We have now to define more precisely what are those derived needs or, as we shall continue to call them, cultural imperatives imposed on man by his own tendency to extend his safety and his comforts, to venture into the dimensions of movement, to increase his speed, to prepare engines of destruction, as well as production, to armor himself with colossal protective devices and construct equivalent means of attack.

If our concept of derived need or cultural imperative is correct, certain new types of behavior are implied in all cultural responses, which are as stringent and ineluctable as every vital sequence is in its own right. In other words, we have to show that man must economically cooperate, that he must establish and maintain order; that he must educate the new and growing organism of each citizen; and that he must somehow implement the means of enforcement in all such activities. We have to show how and where these activities come in and how they combine. Finally, in order to make the processes of derivation and the hierarchy of need clear, we shall have to show how economics, knowledge, religion and mechanisms of law, educational training and artistic creativeness are directly or indirectly related to the basic, that is, physiological needs.

Let us start with the stringency and determinism of the derived imperatives of culture. An individual in every society, start as naked organisms, unarmed, unprotected, and unequipped. Man's anatomical endowment, compared with other animals', is somewhat limited. It lacks any natural weapons, such as claws, fangs, poison receptacles. Man's teeth are not good enough for sawing wood, breaking stone, nor are his hands useful to dig the soil or to kill his prey. Instead of that, man produces sharp and heavy weapons, capable of attaining even a distant aim. He invents and develops instruments to dig, to kill or trap the prey on the ground, in the air, and in the water. He borrows animal furs and prepares textiles from vegetable fiber. The positive factor, the advantages derived from this constant and chronic exploitation of the environment for his own benefit, are as obvious as they are immense. The price which man has to pay in terms of additional determinism of his behavior is clear, too. He has to work on time, know how to do it, and become prepared to rely on his comrades at work.

In a highly developed culture, we have a whole set of specific devices to insure this adherence to our scientific tradition, to our economic organization, and to the accuracy of our

symbolic transmission of ideas and principles. Here, if we want to test our principle of stringency and derived needs, we could well refer to the dramatic demonstration thereof in the present historical world situation. The integral world wars are not waged merely by implements of destruction. Here, obviously, the final aim of this instrumental approach is also biological: the extermination of human organisms. Indirectly, however, here also the victorious army often achieves its ends by disorganizing and confusing the opponents, and thus forcing them to surrender.

The integral war, however, has its concomitants in economic battles, in the contest of nerves, and in propaganda. Here we see that if in an economic war a large modern nation can impose conditions of starvation or even malnutrition, surrender will be achieved by the breakdown of an instrumental apparatus of organized food-production or food import. If, through economic warfare, the supply of raw materials for industrial production can be cut off, destroyed, or labor subverted, we see once more how indirectly and through many relays, the destruction of one of the instrumental, large-scale devices will affect the biological efficiency of a large modern community.

By sapping or undermining the organization, the morale, and the symbolically implemented relation between people, one organized state can, under conditions of war, defeat another. Propaganda, through fifth-column tactics, sometimes introduces what might be called a socio logically disoriented symbolism. When, in the overwhelming of Norway, treacherous orders were given to Norwegian units by German agents, these were correctly formulated symbolic orders placed in the wrong, that is, falsely apprehended, position of authority.

We can thus see, first and foremost, that derived needs have the same stringency as biological needs, and that this stringency is because of the fact that they are always instrumentally related to the wants of the organism. We see also how and where they come into the structure of human organized behavior. We see, finally, that even such highly derived activities as learning and research, art and religion, law and ethics, related as they are with organized performance, with technology, and with accuracy of communication, are also definitely related, although by several removes to the necessity of human beings to survive, to retain health and a normal state of organic efficiency.

In all this it is hardly necessary to emphasize that our concepts and arguments have never moved outside the empirical level of analysis indispensable for a full understanding of facts. It remains now only to tabulate our results and to define the entries clearly and briefly. The adjoining synopsis states, in the first column, the instrumental imperatives of culture so far encountered in our analysis. Also are listed briefly the cultural responses to these imperatives.

<b>IMPERATIVES</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>
1. The cultural apparatus of implements and consumers goods must be produced, used, maintained, and replaced by new production.	Economics
2. Human behavior, as regards its technical, customary, legal, or moral prescription must be codified, regulated in action and sanction.	Social control
3. The human material by which every institution is maintained must be renewed, formed, drilled, and provided with full knowledge of tribal tradition.	Education
4. Authority within each institution must be defined, equipped with powers, and endowed with means of forceful execution of its orders.	Political Organization

## 2.6 CRITICISM

1. The major criticism launched at functional theory was its synchronic or a historical orientation and its alleged failure to explain change.
2. Teleological reasoning: the view that the cultural item emerges to meet the end it fulfills is teleological. It is also teleological when it is maintained that any culture item exists to meet a need of the cultural whole, while the cultural whole exists to meet biological and psychological needs.
3. Malinowski's functionalism is individualistic in nature. Later thinkers developed inter personal and other varieties of it.
4. He viewed culture as a totally integrated way of life-an organic whole, homogenous and

harmonious and tried to show the interrelatedness of various cultural structures. It reduces it to the almost useless proposition that everything is related to everything else.

## 2.7 LET US SUM UP

Malinowski's functionalism in anthropology emphasizes that every aspect of a culture, including customs, institutions, and beliefs, serves a specific function in meeting the needs of individuals and the larger society. It posits that these cultural elements work together to maintain social stability and contribute to overall well-being of the group. Malinowski's approach, also known as psychological functionalism, highlights how culture satisfies both biological and social needs, creating a holistic system.

## 2.8 GLOSSARY

1. **Integrative Needs:** are the cultural elements like religion, magic, art and morals that help a society to cohere and integrate its members by providing shared values and purpose.
2. **Instrumental Needs:** Derived needs that emerge to help meet basic needs through social organization.

## 2.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss in brief the meaning of function.

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2. Explain briefly the theory of Culture.

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3. What is meant by the Term 'Cultural Functionalism'.

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### 2.10 LESSON END EXERCISE

1. Explain the two types of imperatives as discussed by Malinowski.

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2. Malinowski's functionalism is ----- in nature.

3. What is teleological reasoning.

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**Answer: 2. Individualistic.**

### 2.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Makhan Jha, (1999) An Introduction to Anthropological Thought, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
2. Upadhaya and Pandey (1997) History of Anthropological Thought, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.

3. J.H. Turner: (2002) The Structure of Sociological Theory, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

## **2.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answer: Answers: 1- a, 2-true**

**GENERAL THEORY OF ACTION AND SOCIAL SYSTEM**

**TALCOTT PARSONS**

**STRUCTURE**

- 3.0 Learning Objectives**
- 3.1 Introduction**
- 3.2 Life sketch**
- 3.3 Concept of society and social system**
- 3.4 Types of social system**
- 3.5 Functional analysis**
  - 3.5.1 Functional requisites or imperatives**
  - 3.5.2 Equilibrium mechanism**
- 3.6 Interaction and interpenetration between sub-systems**
- 3.7 Criticism**
- 3.8 Theory of Social Action**
- 3.9 Dilemmas of Orientation (Pattern Variables)**
- 3.10 Social Action: A comparative understanding**
- 3.11 Criticism**
- 3.12 Let us Sum up**
- 3.13 Glossary**
- 3.14 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 3.15 Lesson End Exercise**
- 3.16 Suggested Readings**
- 3.17 Answers to check your progress**

### **3.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able to understand:**

- **The concept of system, social system and systemic types;**
- **The contrast to anthropological- Individualist functionalism of Malinowski- sociological functionalism;**
- **Parson's theory of social action; and**
- **The pattern variable approach which explains the dilemmas of value orientation.**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous lesson you came across with the concept of function and also functionalism. As such we discussed, B. Malinowski's individualistic functionalism which was based upon the theory of needs and scientific theory of culture. In this unit, you will learn about sociological functionalism for which we will discuss the contribution of Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist, who has powerful influence on sociology after the Second World War. His major works, which contributed to sociological theorizing, among others are: -

- 1. The Social System (1951)**
- 2. The Structure of Social Action (1951)**
- 3. Essays in sociological theory (1954)**
- 4. Economy and Society (1957)**
- 5. The System of Modern Societies (1971)**

He was, above all, critical of the Chicago school which was preoccupied with only empirical research, in American sociology. According to him, empirical research tends to be barren unless guided by general theoretical frame. We will in this lesson, concentrate on the functional analysis

which has been contributed by his most important work- The social system (1951). His theory, therefore, is known as systematic analysis theory where he argues that:

- a. System is a unified whole made up of interdependent parts called sub-system. Each sub-system can also be treated as a system by itself.
- b. The units or sub-systems must be organized in a relative stable manner so that a definite pattern of relationship comes to exist between sub-systems.
- c. Each system has a boundary.
- d. The variation or change occurs in a system in a definite manner-not by choice.
- e. For the maintenance of the system certain elementary needs of the system Universal and derived needs must be met.

### **3.2 LIFE SKETCH**

Parsons was born in the year 1902 and graduated from London school of Economics in 1924 and his doctorate from Heidelberg University in 1927. He was a keen student of Max Weber and drew also inspiration from Pareto's theory of residue and non-logical actions (which you have studied in Classical Sociology Tradition in the first semester). As such, Parsons' "Structure of Social Action" is a theory reflecting both Durkheim's ideas of collective consciousness in the function of social system and Weber's analysis of social action. The 'action frame of reference' of Parsons comprises a unified conceptual scheme for theory and research in social sciences to analyze human behaviour or human action. It is a point of reference of the action of an actor or group of actions, a situation, and the orientation of the actor to the situation. The major works of Talcott Parsons are the following which one should consult to understand his theory of Social Action.

- **Economy and Society (1957)**
- **Essays in Sociological Theory (1954)**
- **The Structure of Social Action (1951)**

- **The Social System (1951)**
- **The System of Modern Societies (1971)**

Parsons was born in the year 1902 and graduated from London school of Economics in the year 1924. In 1927 he got his Ph.D. from Heidelberg University. Parsons was a keen student of German social thinkers, which is proved from the fact that he translated Max Weber's work, "Protestant Ethics and the spirit of Capitalism". He also drew inspirations from Pareto's theory of residue and non-logical actions.

Parsons started his teaching career as a teacher in Emeritus College and subsequently joined Harvard University and in 1944 he was appointed as Professor of sociology.

### **3.3 CONCEPT OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL SYSTEM**

For Parsons Society embraced the entire social field of man. "A society may be defined as the total complex of relationships in so far as they grow out of actions in terms of means-end relationship, intrinsic and symbolic". The society is also affected by environments, heredity, and cultures on the one hand and religions, metaphysical and political system on the other. He, thus, characterized society as a sum total of all human relationship.

Talcott Parson's one of the most important works is on social system. A social system, he defined, is a mode of organization of action elements relative to the persistence or ordered processes of change of the interactive pattern of a plurality of individual actors.

Thus; you may consider the following to understand a social system.

1. It consists of plurality of individuals.
2. Its elementary unit is act, in so far as it is connected with the process of interaction. It involves a process of interaction between two or more actors.
3. As a system of interaction, it involves participation of an actor in the process of interactive relationship.

4. The system consists of inter-dependence of parts. The participation of actors involves two aspects:
- a) The positional aspect indicates the location of an actor in a social system. You know about the concept of status through the lessons you read in the first semester. Status, thus, represents the position of an actor in a social system. Thus, an actor has a high or low status in the system.
  - b) The processual aspect represents the functional significance of an actor in relation to the social system. He was to perform certain functions and a definite role to play.

In other words, the positional aspect is called status and processual aspect is called his role. Therefore, when the behaviour of an actor is associated with a particular status, then that is called his role.

The distinction between status and role with reciprocal perspectives are inherent in the process of interaction. The actor is an object of orientation for others as well as the actor is oriented to other actors. Therefore, when the actor is not an object but he is acting, then you may say that he is playing his role. Status and role, in this sense, are not attributes of an actor but one primary ingredients of a social system you may see Box 'A' to know about status and role and its significance in a social system.

#### **Box 'A'**

**Statuses:** Every social system has prescribed certain status for its members. It is either acquired by a hereditary manner or as a result of actions of a society. There are certain facilities, power and prestige attached with the status. The arrangement of the status provides strength and stability to the social system.

**Role:** Like status, the society has prescribed different role to different individuals. Every status is attached with a role. Thus, role is the external expression of the status. While playing his role every individual keeps in mind his status. This helps in social integration, organization and unity in the social system.

A social system is thus a system of differentiated roles. Roles are assigned to actors. This process of distribution of roles, Parsons calls as allocation. A social system is, therefore, confronted with the problem of allocation. In the functioning of the system, the allocation of roles must be proper. The criteria adopted for this initial allocation is of ascriptive nature - may be on the bases of age, sex and birth. The other subsequent methods of role allocation are through appointment and competition. The appointment depends on the explicit decision of other persons while competition is a selective process.

The allocation of role and status also involves the problem of allocation of facilities. For Parsons, "Facilities are possessions which are significant as means to further goals in complexes of instrumental orientation. Allocations of facilities are to be done because their supply is limited in comparison to demand. Possession of facilities means to have power-economic and political. The two types of power are integral to the social system.

Then there is problem of reward. By reward we mean those transferable entities or possession which is desired as objects to immediate gratification by actors. The difference between facility and reward is that any possession towards an actor is oriented is facility, but it may be regarded as reward if actors' orientation is expressive.

### **3.4 TYPES OF SOCIAL SYSTEM**

**Parsons presents a classification of form major types:**

- 1. Particularistic-Ascriptive:** This type of system is organized around kinship and sociality. The normative patterns of such a system are traditional and dominated by the elements of ascription.
- 2. Particularistic-Achievement:** In this type, the continuation of the old religion's ethic is inherent but at the same time emergence of a new mode of social integration in which performance becomes more important than qualities. Parsons cite Chinese social structure as an example.

3. **Universalistic Achievement Type:** When traditional order is challenged and emergences of new norms are derived from the existing relations of social member. The norms become universalistic. Besides, they are related with empirical or non-empirical goals, therefore they are achievement oriented. The most modern society is the example.
4. **Universalistic-Ascription Type:** Under this social type, elements of value orientation are dominated by the elements of ascription. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the status of the actor rather than his performance. Such a system becomes politicized and aggressive. An authoritarian state is the example.

The systems theory, analytically, may be summarized as follows:

1. The social system is made up of the interaction of human individuals.
2. Each member is both actor and object of orientation for both other actors and himself.
3. The actor is seeking a goal or set of goals.
4. The actor is confronted with a variety of situational conditions as societal environment and ecological constraints.
5. The actor's orientation to situation is both motivational and value- orientational.

Before we proceed further, you may note that Parsons in his book the Structure of Social Action, focused on unit act, but in the other book, The Social System, the emphasis shifted from unit act to institutional orders. Thus, the later view emphasized the system as a primary unit of analysis.

The concept of institutionalization, for Parsons, is crucial to the understanding of the system. He considers institutionalization as the fundamental integrative mechanism of social systems. It builds up and maintains social structure.

### **3.5 FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS**

Parson's functionalism moves through two distinct phases. (a) the mechanism- equilibrium and (b) the functional requisite phase. However, the mechanism equilibrium gets incorporated in the requisite phase. Let us therefore discuss the functional requisites. Parsons has outlined four fundamental functions which any

system must perform.

1. **Adaptation:** This is adaptation to the environment involving production and allocation of disposable resources.
2. **Goal attainment function:** To maximize the capacity of the society to attain collective goals.
3. **Integration:** This is about the ordering of the systems by bringing together the motivational and cultural elements.
4. **Latency or pattern maintenance and tension management:** This fourth function is to maintain adequate motivation to conform with the cultural values. This is function of social control as it is to reward conformity and to check disruptive behaviour. These four functional problems or requisites, or imperatives are abbreviated as A, G, I, L.

For a quick summary of the four functional problems which every social system is confronted with in maintaining a society are:

The pattern maintenance function is to deal with the problem of maintaining and reinforcing the basic values of the social systems. It also resolves the tensions. While the integration function of the system refers to the allocation of rights and obligations, rewards and facilities. This will ensure a harmonic relation between the members of the social system. Goal attainment involves the necessity of mobilizing actors and resources for the attainment of specific goals and adaptation refers to the production of resources to facilitate the attainment of specific goals. Let us see the functioning of a social system through an example you can read Box 'B' for it.

### Box- 'B'

**Considering a factory as a social system, Parsons' scheme may be seen as under:**

1. **Adaptive functions:** Proper lighting, air conditioning, suitable machinery, food services and other working condition.
2. **Goal attainment functions:** Processing, manufacturing, marketing, research activities.
3. **Integrative function:** Management labour councils, clubs, publications and public relations, recreational and social events, insurance and labour welfare programmes.
4. **Pattern maintenance and tension management functions:** Training, orientation sessions, allocation of rank, salary structure, promotion, increment and bonuses, disciplinary control, mechanism for the redress of grievances.

#### 3.5.1 FUNCTIONAL IMPERATIVES & SYSTEM, SUB-SYSTEMS RELATIONS

In collaboration with Bales and Shills and afterwards with Neil-J- Smelser, the conception of functional imperatives came to dominate in Parsons' writing. Considering the question of survival of the social system, Parsons, thus, conceptualized the four requisites (read requirements) of adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency. As you already know that all these requisites were viewed under the general problem of integration. In Parsons' discussion of integration within and between action systems, problem of securing facilities (adaptation), allocation and goal seeking (goal attainment), socialization and social control (latency) were conscious. Parsons, however, did not confine to the general social system. He also viewed a system has different action sub-systems and sub-sub systems. What Turner has called "functional sectorization".

"As Parsons' conceptual scheme became increasingly oriented to function, social systems are divided into sectors, each corresponding to a functional requisite that is, A, G, I, or L. In turn, any sub-system can be divided into these four functional sectors. And then, each of these sub-systems can be divided into four functional sectors, and so on. (Turner: 70)

The system that has been discussed above, the most important development involved four

system requisites that all action systems whether cultural, social, personality or organismic – must meet if they are to survive.

### **3.5.2 EQUILIBRIUM PHASE**

Parsons, analytically, separates four action systems – (1) the cultural (2) social (3) personality and (4) organismic. The “cultural” is the system of symbols that is created and used by humans. The “social” is the system of relationship created out of interaction among individuals. The “personality” is the system of traits such as needs, dispositions, cognitive states and interpersonal skills that actors possess and draw upon as they interact with each other. The other element of unit acts – biological and physical parameters are the “organismic” system. According to Parsons, all relations between the social system and the physical environment are mediator through behavioural organism. Plasticity and sensitivity are the two properties in it. Parsons then goes on to discuss the integration of the personality system into social system. He identified two mechanisms for this (1) the mechanisms of socialization which involve the processes wherein the cultural symbols get internalized by the personality and also motives and skills are acquired for role playing. The other mechanism is of social control. These mechanisms include (a) institutionalization of norms (b) informal interpersonal sanctions to reduce deviance (c) ritual performances to release tensions (d) safety value organizations (e) reintegration structures for rehabilitation of the deviants (f) the concentration of power for the restoration of order through coercion.

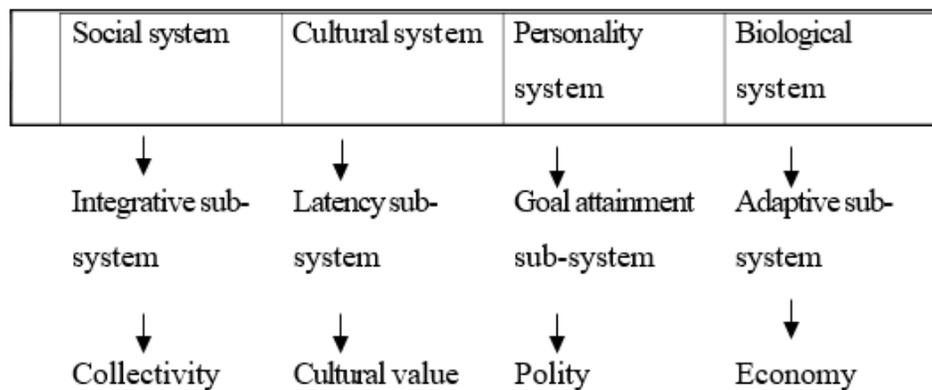
The above two mechanisms thus resolve the problem of assuring that actors are committed and able to play roles in the social system and that they will continue to conform to the normative expectations. If these mechanisms are ineffective, the social equilibrium will be disrupted. This prompted Parsons to include the cultural patterns – values, beliefs and other symbols with the social system analysis. He further introduced the next action sub-system – the personality system. His concern was to analyze as to how some degree of integration is possible among these systems.

### **3.6 INTERACTION BETWEEN THE SUB-SYSTEMS**

The interpenetration between the four action sub-systems (social, cultural, personality and biological) can be seen with following manner. The social system being the integrative sub-system of action, the other three principal sub systems (culture, personality and organismic) constitute the environments of the social system. The four functional imperatives (primary sub-systems of society)

– adaptive, goal-attainment, integrative, and latency – are functionally specialized around their inter-relations with the three other sub-systems (culture, personality, organism) of action, each relating most directly to one of these environments (action sub-systems). Each of these four societal sub-systems may also be considered a distinct environment of the sub-system which is the society’s integrative core.

#### SUB-SYSTEMS OF ACTION



### 3.7 CRITICISM

Criticism of Parsonian functionalism started in the late 1960’s and by the early 1970’s critiques had dislodged Parsonian theory from its once dominant place.

1. A number of critics questioned whether Parson’s emerging concepts correspond to the events in the real world. Dahrendorf compares Parsonian social system with utopia.
2. Buckley argues that Parson’s social system does not advocate change. According to him, it is a vaguely conceptualized amalgam of mechanistic and organismic models, spacing excessive emphasis on integration, consensus and stability and devaluates change, conflict and strife.
3. It is teleological: Parsons always considered action to be goal directed. Thus, Parson’s

conceptualization of goal attainment as a basis system requisite would make inevitable teleological propositions.

4. It is tautological: Parsons' conceptualization of four system requisites (AGIL) is based on the assumption that if they are not met, the systems survival is threatened. Turner says that "unless there is some way to determine what constitutes survival and non-survival of a system. The propositions documenting the contribution of items for meeting survival requisites become tautologies i.e. the items meet survival needs of the system because it exists and, therefore, must be surviving.

### **3.8 THEORY OF SOCIAL ACTION**

Talcott Parson's primary concern throughout his life was the problem of order in society. Some themes, such as social action and systems ran through all of Parson's writings till his death. Parson's view of social action changed throughout his scholarly life from 'social behaviorism to macro functionalism. Around the time of World War II however, he extended his action framework through his publication of the Structure of Social Action (1937).

Parsons wrote social action is:

1. Volaristic or a matter of making choices. This is known as Parson's choice-based theory. Social action involved actor, with goals, choosing between alternatives.
2. Subjective action which is based on internal orientations and responses.
3. Thirdly social action is at least partially governed or limited by norms and values of one's culture.

For Parsons, "action is behaviour oriented to the attainment of ends in situations by means of normatively regulated expenditure of energy". The modes of orientation or motivation for individual actions include the cognitive, cathectic and evaluative or in simple words they be stated as –thinking, feeling and valuing or willing.

In short, the behaviour of an individual or society in a social context is called social action. In his

book the structure of Social Action he attempted to construct a functional theory of social organization by explaining voluntary action. The elements of this action are the following: -

1. Actors are individual persons or even collectivity.
2. Actor has goals.
3. Actor has alternative means to achieve goals.
4. Actor gets confronted with a variety of situations that influence the selection of goals and means.
5. Actors' subjective orientation. Thus, the essentials of social action are:

1. **Actor**      2. **Situation**      3. **Orientation**

**1. Actor:** As has been said earlier action may be of an individual or a collectivity.

**2. Situation:** Refers to the external world which is significant to the action which involves either

(i) social objects or (ii) nonsocial objects.

(I) Social objects refer to actors as persons as well as collectivities. Interaction takes place between social objects i.e. actors as persons.

(II) Nonsocial objects refer to those in which interaction do not take place. They are two types: (a) Physical objects which are located in space and times. (b) Cultural objects which are elements of tradition- i.e. laws, ideas, recipes. However, every object is significant to the action. Therefore, the property of an object which makes it significant to the action is called a modality. Thus, there is social modality and non-social modality.

**3. Orientation:** is conceived as a process which involves different analytic elements. These elements represent different aspects of the process of orientation. They are of two types.

(i) Motivational elements and (ii) elements of value orientation

(i) Motivational orientations are related to actual or potential gratification or deprivation of actions need dispositions. Three modes of orientations in terms of motivation are:

(a) **Cognitive:** The knowledge through which the actor sees an object in relation

to his system of need dispositions.

- (b) **Cathectic:** refers to those processes by which an effective significance is invested to an object.
  - (c) **Evaluation:** refers to the various processes by which the allocation of energy between different objects is made by an action. This helps in optimizing the gratification.
- (ii) **Value orientation:** refers to those aspects which commit the actors to the observance of certain norms, standards of selection whenever the actor is in a situation which requires him to make a choice. It is a set of guidance. It consists of three modes:
- (a) **Cognitive:** involves various commitments to standards by which appropriate of cognitive judgment is established.
  - (b) **Appreciative:** involves commitments to standards by which appropriateness of consistency of the class of objects is assessed.
  - (c) **Moral:** It involves commitments to standards by which the consequences of particular actions are assessed.

### 3.9 PATTERN VARIABLES (DILEMMAS OF ORIENTATION)

In delineating the structure of action Parsons initially followed the lead from Tonnies *Gesellschaft*. However, soon he became convinced that a given structure might clearly exhibit attributes suggestive of both the polar types. The professional status-role of the physician is a case in point. In terms of the application of the general principles of medical science, the physician's relation to his patient is *Gesellschaft* – like but by virtue of the canon that the “welfare of the patient” should come ahead of the self-interest of the doctor, this was clearly one of the *Gemeinschaft*.

It is otherwise known as pattern variables or pattern dilemma. In a given situation, according to Parsons, the actor is confronted by a series of major dilemmas of orientation. He has to make choice of means for the attainment of goals. The object of a situation don not interacts with the cognizing and cathective organism in such a fashion as to determine meaning of situation. Therefore, in order to have

a determinate meaning, the actor must make a series of choices. These choices are dichotomous. In the words of Parsons, “a pattern variable is a dichotomy, one side of which must be chosen by an actor before the meanings of a situation is determinate for him and thus, he can act with respect of that situation”. The following five pattern variables or dilemmas of orientations have been identified by Parsons:

- |                                     |            |   |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---|
| <b>1. Ascriptive Orientation</b>    | <b>Vs</b>  | <b>Achievement Orientation</b>          |
| <b>2. Particularism Orientation</b> | <b>Vs</b>  | <b>Universalism Orientation</b>         |
| <b>3. Affectivity Orientation</b>   | <b>Vs</b>  | <b>Affective Neutrality Orientation</b> |
| <b>4. Diffuseness Orientation</b>   | <b>Vs</b>  | <b>Specificity Orientation</b>          |
| <b>5 Self-Orientation</b>           | <b>vs.</b> | <b>Collectivity Orientation</b>         |

These pattern variables enter in personality system, social system and cultural system.

In personality system they describe predispositions. In the social system, they describe role expectations. In cultural system, they define patterns of value orientations.

The following scheme of pattern variables can be discussed in detail:

### **1. The dilemma of object modalities:**

In a situation the actor faces the problem of how to treat an object. The resolution is either giving primacy to the qualities of social objects or their performance. The dichotomy of Ascriptive vs. Achievement orientations is used here. Originally designed as Ascription vs. Achievement; it is the choice between ‘modalities’ of the social object. This is the dilemma of according primary treatment to an object on the basis of what it is in itself, an inborn quality, or what it does, and the quality of its performance. The former involves defining people on the basis of certain attributes such as age, sex, colour, nationality, etc.; the latter defines people on basis of their abilities. Compulsory retirement, racial discrimination and the notion of ‘caste superiority’ are based on considerations of quality. Recruitment of personal in a modern bureaucracy based on technical qualifications and standard tests involves consideration of performance.

## **2. The dilemma of transcendence Vs. immanence:**

In a situation, the actor faces the problem whether to treat the objects in accordance with general norms or in accordance with general norms or in accordance to their relationship. Thus, the primacy is given either to universalistic norms or value systems or to value standards integral to the particular relations or particularism. This is the dichotomy of particularistic orientation Vs universalistic orientation i.e. the choice between types of value-orientation standard. The former refers to standards determined by an actor's particular relations with a particular object; the latter refers to value standards that are highly generalized. A teacher is supposed to give grades to all students 'impartially', that is, in accordance with the same abstract, general, universal principles. But if he favours his son or a friend who happens be in the same class, he is behaving particularistically, for he is treating people differently on the basis of their particular relationship to him. To give another example: a woman on the trial jury has to be universalistic, otherwise she will be dishonest; but as a wife she has to be particularistic, otherwise she will be unfaithful.

## **3. The dilemma of gratifications of impulse Vs. discipline:**

In a given situation when particular impulses press for gratification then the problem arises to the actor regarding the release of impulses. Thus, primacy is given either, to evaluative considerations at the cost of immediate gratifications or to immediate gratification at the cost of evaluative consideration (Affectivity vs. Affective neutrality). The pattern is affective when an organized action system emphasizes gratification that is when an actor tries to avoid pain and to maximize pleasure; the pattern is affectively neutral when it imposes discipline, and renouncement or deferment of some gratifications in favour of other interests. For example, soldiers are expected to ignore immediate gratification and be affectively neutral in their line of duty even if that involves risking their impulse gratifications are negatively evaluated by cultural patterns.

## **4. The dilemma of the scope of significance of the object:**

When confronted with an object, the actor has to choose the possible ranges with which he will respond to the object. The dilemma is resolved either by accepting no prior limitation to the

range or by accepting limited (specific) range of the object. Here no prior limitation is diffuseness and specific range of object is specificity orientations. This Dichotomy is known as Diffuseness vs. specificity which defines the scope of interest in the object. This is the dilemma of defining the relation borne by object. This is the dilemma of defining the relation borne by object to actor as indefinitely wide in scope, infinitely broad in involvement, morally obligating, and significant in pluralistic situations (diffuseness); or specifically limited in scope and involvement (specificity). The relationship between the employer and the employees in a modern factory is specific since no obligation is assumed to exist beyond what is specified in the 'contract'. However, certain systems of land tenure such as the semi-feudal and zamindari types are supposed to involve the tenants in an infinite variety of obligations to their 'masters'. Similarly, patterns of friendship and husband – wife relationships are supposed to involve a 'limitless' number of obligations.

#### **5. Dilemma of private vs. Collective interest:**

In a situation, when there is harmony of interest, the actor is confronted with the problem whether he should choose actions for private interest (self) or collective interest. This is the dilemma of self-vs. collectivity orientation (selfless). This dichotomy depends on social norms or shared expectations which define as legitimate the pursuit of the actor's private interests or obligate him to act in the interests of the group. Salesmen and shopkeepers are expected to glorify their products and give 'sales talk' in accordance with self-orientation but the doctor is expected to tell the patient what is best for him, even if he can make extra money from an expensive operation. This dichotomy has nothing to do with 'selfish' or 'altruistic' motives which are individual character traits but with shared expectations commonly held by a collectivity.

Looking at individual choices from a macro-cultural perspective, parsons noted that different cultures guide individuals toward one or the other of a set of dichotomas choices. Further Parsons noted that one set of choices is dominant in the mechanical solidary or traditional society. While the other usually occurred in the organically solidary or bureaucratic (modern) society.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. What is Talcott Parson's definition of Society. Explain in two lines.**

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**2. What are the four functional requisites/imperatives/problems, given by Talcott Parsons.**

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**3. Which of the following is not one of the pattern variables identified by Parsons.**

- a) Ascriptive Orientation vs Achievement Orientation
- b) Particularism Orientation vs Universal Orientation
- c) Affectivity Orientation vs Affective Neutrality Orientation
- d) Traditional Orientation vs Rational Orientation

**3.10 SOCIAL ACTION: A COMPARATIVE VIEW**

The concept of social action is used both by social psychologists and sociologists. Action is social when the actor behaves in such a manner that his action is intended to influence the actions of one or more other persons. Max Weber was the first to use social action as a basis for theory.

Later on, Parsons extended and modified it. Max Weber gives an ethical conception of social action and divides action into three analytical categories – Ration, emotive, traditional. Parsons, as such, provided a rational-cum- instrumental definition of action and sees continuity in the action frame of reference. Seber whiel defines social action in terms of motivation (which is a subjective category), Parsons defines social action as a logical category in which both subjectivity and objectivity, intention and normative order, and individual and social situation are combined. According to Parsons all actions are rational from an actor's perspective and orientation and society is basically a system of evolutionary process in which the meaning, ideology and essence of action change. This thesis is basically a modification of the Weberian conception of social action in which it is assumed that particular human society is regulated by single social action system which can be controlled with other forms of action prevalent in other societies and situations. Nevertheless, there is an array of similarities between Weber and Parsons.

### **3.11 CRITICISM**

Talcott Parson has not focused on change as a relevant field of study. He over emphasized on the normative order by making people puppets to account for the problem of social change. This overemphasis on the normative order and problem of social change are the chief limitations of Parsonian theory of action.

### **3.12 LET US SUM UP**

While Weber is concerned with nature, causes, and results of social action, it is Parsons who was concerned with functional analysis of social action. He characterized society as sum total of all human relationship.

### 3.13 GLOSSARY

1. A **pattern variable** is a dichotomy, one side of which must be chosen by an actor before the meanings of a situation is determinate for him and thus, he can act with respect of that situation.

2. Four Functional Imperatives of Talcott Parsons

**A-Adaptation**

**G-Goal attainment**

**I-Integration**

**L-Latency**

### 3.14 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss in brief various types of social system.

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2. Explain in detail the theory of Social Action.

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3. What do you understand by Functional Analysis.

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4. Give a brief Introduction of Talcott Parsons.

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### 3.15 LESSON END QUESTIONS

1. Which of these is not one of the functional prerequisites as discussed by Talcott Parsons.

- a) Adaptation
- b) Goal attainment
- c) Integration
- d) Value Consensus

2. What are the three main essential elements of social action according to Parsons.

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3. What are the three modes of orientations in terms of motivation, given by Parsons.

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**Answers: 1-d**

### **3.16 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- 1 Talcott Parsons: (1951) *The Social System*. The Free Press.
- 2 J. Turner: (2002), *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Jaipur, Rawat Publications.
- 3 M. Francis Abraham: (1999), *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, Oxford Univ. Press.
- 4 Upadhaya and Pandey: (1997), *History of Anthropological Thought*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company.

### **3.17 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 3-d**

**CRITIQUE AND REFORMULATION OF FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS:**

**R.K MERTON**

**STRUCTURE**

**4.0 Learning Objectives**

**4.1 Introduction**

**4.2 Biographic Note**

**4.3 Selected Writing**

**4.4 The concept of function**

**4.5 Prevailing postulates in functional analysis**

**4.6 Merton's Paradigm for functional analysis in Sociology**

**4.7 Let us Sum Up**

**4.8 Glossary**

**4.9 Self-assessment Questions**

**4.10 Lesson End Exercise**

**4.11 Suggested Readings**

**4.12 Answers to check your progress**

**4.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- **understand the concept of function.**

- **know about the various functional postulates.**
- **understand the Merton's Paradigm for functional analysis.**

## **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

After the initiation of functional theory by Emile Durkheim, B. Malinowski, and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, two American sociologists – Talcott Parsons and Robert King Merton have given a new shape to functional analysis in the middle of the twentieth century. R.K. Merton not only provides a critique of the notions and assumptions of functionalism advocated by Durkheim, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown but also traces the clear etymology of the concept of function, reformulates their inherent assumptions and placed a systematic frame work for functional analysis in sociology. Here, after giving a brief biographic note and selected writings, his critique of assumptions of earlier functionalists is narrated and thereafter his frame work for functional analysis is presented along with what has been derived as a guide (he calls it protocol) for researchers following his functional analysis is described.

## **4.2 BIOGRAPHIC NOTE**

Robert King Merton (popularly and mostly known as R.K. Merton) was born on 5 July 1910 in a Jewish immigrant family in a South Philadelphia slum. Here, his father was a carpenter and a truck driver. He grew up with a passion for learning and after schooling won a scholarship at Temple University. At Temple University, he received his B.A degree and became interested in Sociology while taking an introductory sociology course taught by George E. Simpson. Merton himself said, “It was not so much the substance of what Simpson said that did it. It was more the joy of discovering that it was possible to examine human behaviour objectively and without using loaded moral pre-conceptions”. Merton received a doctorate from Harvard University where he was one of the earliest and most intelligent students of Talcott Parsons. Parsons stated that of the significant relations he had with students, “The most important single one was with Robert Merton”. For a long time, Parsons and Merton came to be

known as leaders of structural functional theory among American Sociologists. At Harvard, Merton was also influenced by Pitrim Sorokin who was not sympathetic towards Parsons. After serving for only a small span elsewhere, Merton joined Columbia State University, New York and came in contact with Paul F. Lazarsfeld. Both were closely associated and established Bureau of Applied Social Research. He became active in empirical research under the influence of his colleague Lazars Feld since 1941. He worked in Columbia till his last and achieved the rare distinction of the title “University Professor Emeritus”. He became president of American Sociological Society in 1957. Though he began his research with sociology of science but he is a known theorist of sociology of middle twentieth century.

#### **4.3 SELECTED WRITINGS**

Some of his writings became very famous and he was the most quoted author not only in social science but also of science in 1960’s. On theory, his writings include, “Manifest and Latent Functions”, “Theory and Empirical Research – Two Essays”, ‘theory of status and role’, “Reference Group Behaviour” and further “Continuities in the Theory of Reference Group Behaviour”. All his essays and papers which are pertinent writings in the area of sociological theory, published in various sources, have been compiled in one volume ‘Social Theory and Social Structure’ first published in 1949, second edition in 1957 and the third enlarged edition in 1968. This book has been translated into many languages.

#### **4.4 THE CONCEPT OF FUNCTION**

R.K. Merton has done a unique exercise by tracing various etymological/contextual meanings of the term function under the heading “Single Term, Diverse Concepts”. At first function means ‘simple public gathering or festive occasion’, usually conducted with ceremonial overtones. Secondly, function is ‘equivalent to occupation’, tracing a definition of occupation from the writings of Max Weber. At the third place, function refers to the ‘activities assigned to the incumbent of a social status’, more particularly to the occupant of an office or political position. Fourthly function, as used in mathematics, refers to ‘a variable considered in relation to one or more variables’ in terms of which it can be expressed on the value of which its own value

depends ( $y = fx$ ). In the fifth place, as used in biology, function refers to the 'vital or organic processes considered in respects in which they contribute to the maintenance of the organism'. Merton states that it is this usage, with modifications appropriate to the study of human society, that anthropologists have adopted and clarified the key concept of function.

According to Merton, and that appears to be true, Radcliffe-Brown has been the most explicit in tracing his working conception of social function to the analogical model found in biological sciences. Durkheim, in his famous work 'Division of Labour in Society' used the notion of 'function' clearly referring to like vital and organic processes when he writes, 'function of a social institution is thus the correspondence between it and the need of the organism'. But it was Radcliffe-Brown who made the explicit use of the term function and more clearly defined. He writes, "The function of a recurrent physiological process is thus a correspondence between it and the needs (i.e. necessary conditions of existence) of the organism". He replaces the word needs, as stated by Durkheim, by the terms 'necessary conditions of existence' (the conditions without which the organism will not survive). In the social sphere where individual human beings, 'the essential units', are connected by networks of social relations into an integrated whole (may be termed as society) Radcliffe-Brown clearly defined function as, "the function of any recurrent activity", such as the punishment of a crime, or a funeral ceremony, "is the part it plays in the social life as a whole and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of structural continuity".

Though B. Malinowski defers in some respects from the formulation of Radcliffe-Brown but he joins Radcliffe-Brown in making the core of functional analysis, Malinowski states, "the part which (social or cultural items) play in the society". Further Malinowski states, "Theory aims at explanation of anthropological facts (social or cultural items) by their function, (function) by the part they play within the integral system of culture, by the manner in which they are related to each other within the system. In later writings the notion 'part played in social and cultural system' is used as synonymous with 'inter-dependence' and 'contribution', etc. The difference of notion further blurs between the concept of function as "inter-dependence" and as "process".

R.K. Merton has derived the essence of the concept of function formulated and used by

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and B. Malinowski. Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown used the concept of function in the understanding of primitive societies. The essence of their formulations has been examined by Merton in order to use the concept of function in the understanding of complex societies like the American society in early and middle twentieth century. The essence of these formulations on the concept of function has been presented by R.K. Merton in terms of postulates of functionalism. In his essay “manifest and latent functions” which is reprinted as a chapter in the book “Social Theory and Social Structure”, he reformulates these postulates in the light of the institutions and processes of complex societies so as to make use of these theoretical capsules in the understanding of the society in which he himself was living. Though, the clarification and elaboration of the concept of function will be discussed in detail in the ‘paradigm for functional analysis in Sociology’ in the next section but briefly the meaning of function may be noted here which will be used in the examination and reformulation of the earlier meanings of function given by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski.

Defining the word function Merton writes, “Functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system”. He considers that there has been a tendency to observe only the positive contributions of a sociological item to the social or cultural system in which it is implicated. But there are also some contributions of at least some social or cultural items which, over a period of time, become otherwise i.e. it starts becoming as obstacle/hindrane and thus instead of increasing adaptation or adjustment it decreases/lessens the adjustment or adaptation of a given system. Considering this, he introduced the notion of dysfunction and states, “dysfunctions are those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system” There is also the empirical possibility of non-functional consequences which are simply irrelevant to the system under consideration”. He also elaborates the notion further which are apparent and those which are hidden by using the terms ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ functions. These will be clarified in detail in the paradigm in a later section. Here it should be clearly understood that Merton has considered the notion of function as a positive contribution of a social or cultural item as has been considered by earlier functionalists, namely Radcliffe- Brown and Malinowski. But he does consider that there are also some consequences of such items which may contribute to the contrary i.e. do not contribute to the adjustment or adaptation of a given

system that means to integration and continuity of ordered social life. It is not only a logical possibility or utopia but also that is found to be true in empirical situations. Merton very well convinced of this reality and verified on the role of some social institutions, norms and traditions. It is after this realization that he has further added the concept of 'dysfunction' or negative consequences. This serves as a starting point for examining the concept of function as propagated by early functionalists. He was also aware of the changes that are occurring in western societies, particularly American society. The earlier notion of function assumed that there was no stress but in complex societies stress was an important factor. The stress indicates changes of some or the other variety, let alone the changes in functions of a social institution or social and cultural item. With these considerations, the earlier prominent formulations of 'function' are examined in terms of what Merton has labeled as 'Prevailing Postulates in Functional Analysis' (in Sociology).

#### **4.5 PREVAILING POSTULATES IN FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS: MERTON'S CRITIQUE**

Merton's stated that in anthropology the functional analysis has commonly adopted three interconnected postulates. These postulates, he finds, have proved to be debatable and to some extent unnecessary to the functional orientation in sociology. These three postulates substantially hold at first – 'that standardized social activities or cultural items are for entire (whole) social or cultural system. Second – that all such social and cultural items fulfill sociological functions, and the third – that these social or cultural items are consequently indispensable. He says these three are like 'articles of faith' of earlier anthropologists and ordinarily seen together. He examines these three postulates separately as he considers that 'each gives rise to its own distinctive difficulties'. These three postulates and their examination by Merton in the light of the complex societies are presented here.

##### **1. POSTULATE OF THE FUNCTIONAL UNITY OF SOCIETY**

According to Merton, it is Radcliffe-Brown who put this postulate in clear cut terms when he wrote in his essay 'On the concept of Function'; "The function of a particular social usage is the contribution it makes to the total social life as the functioning of the total social system". Merton says this view implies that a social system has a certain kind of unity which we may say as a functional unity. By the social

system here Merton means the total social structure of a society with totality of usages, in which that structure appears and on which it depends for its continued existence.

The functional unity, Merton defines, as a condition to which all parts of the social system work together with harmony or internal consistency. That means without producing any persistent conflicts. He further considers that Radcliffe-Brown describes this notion of functional unity as a hypothesis.

This view of 'functional unity' was first criticized by Malinowski when in his essay "Anthropology" (1939) he wrote that the sociological school exaggerated the social solidarity of primitive man. According to Merton, Malinowski does not remove this dubious assumption (of all items and total social system) but has added another to it. Merton says, on the basis of other writings, that there are highly integrated organisms like nervous system or hormones. The loss of anyone may strongly affect the whole system and will cause death. But there are so many lower organisms much more loosely correlated, where loss of a part causes temporary inconvenience till the regeneration of replacement tissues. This view, he considers, is true when we look at small, highly integrated aboriginal tribes. But when we look at highly differentiated, complex societies which have large realm, it does not. Merton examines this assumption of 'functional unity' by tracing several illustrations from numerous sociological and anthropological writings. After reviewing the utility and difficulty Merton says this unity of the total society cannot be posited in advance of observation. The theoretic framework of functional analysis requires that there be specification of the units for which the given social or cultural item is functional. Such a frame requires that a given item has diverse consequences, some are functional and others are dysfunctional, for individuals, for sub-groups and for more inclusive social structure and culture. In scrutinizing the postulate of functional unity, he finds that we cannot assume full integration of all societies, but we should find a range of degrees of integration. It is developed by him after examining the role of religion in multi-religious complex societies that functional analysis calls for specification of the social unit's sub served by the given social functions, recognizing that culture has multiple consequences, some are functional and others, perhaps, dysfunctional.

## **2. POSTULATE OF UNIVERSAL FUNCTIONALISM**

According to Merton this postulate holds that all standardized social or cultural forms have positive functions. Merton considers that Malinowski advances this view in its most extreme form, when he writes that ‘the functional view of culture insists that in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea or belief fulfills some vital function’. Some other anthropologists have also advocated such view with some variation and they attach functional value for all forms of culture. Someone wrote that no culture forms survive unless they constitute responses which are adjusted or adaptive in some sense.

Merton further asserts that this postulate is of course the product of fierce barren and protracted controversy over survivals. The concept had become important for reconstructing ‘stages of development’ for the evolutionary theorists of non-literate societies. As a matter of criticism of the evolutionary theorist’s early functionalists over-reacted on the concept of survival and thus asserted on every custom, belief, etc. fulfilling some vital function. Survivals are a poor record of history and thus can be ignored by sociologists of complex societies. Because there are functions and dysfunctions of cultural or social items therefore what remains or survives is the net balance of consequences of those items either for the society as a whole considered as a unit or for sub-groups which are powerful to retain these forms intact.

Thus, Merton reviews the second postulate of universal functionalism which asserts the view that all persisting forms of culture are inevitably functional. This review for other considerations which he says must be met by a codified approach to functional analysis. Merton thus suggests that we may not remain limited to discovering functions (positive consequences) and dysfunctions (negative consequences) of the cultural forms or items but must develop methods for assessing net balance of consequences<sup>8</sup>. If we lack in doing so, perhaps merit of functional analysis will be limited.

### **3. POSTULATE OF INDISPENSABILITY**

This postulate follows from the functional theory of Malinowski. According to Merton, this third postulate is most ambiguous of all the three. This has been manifested in the above cited declaration of Malinowski. He quotes Malinowski who said, “In every type of civilization,

every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfills some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole". Thus, following this assertion, e.g. religion is the institution (cultural item) which is indispensable in a society. It is because religion plays a vital (unique) and indispensable part in society.

But upon examination Merton says that it is not so much the institution of religion which is regarded as indispensable but rather the functions which it performs. For example, it makes the members of a society to adopt 'certain ultimate values and ends in common'. These are the 'values and common ends' which are necessary and indispensable for a society rather the institution of religion. These must appear to the members as a reality. It is the role of religious beliefs and rituals to supply and reinforce the appearance of reality. Through the worship of the sacred objects and the beings they symbolize, and the codes of behaviour, control over human conduct it is exercised. Thus, in the course of this for sustaining itself, religion takes the institutional structure. In this way, the indispensability of religion may be based on the assumption that it is through 'worship' and 'supernatural prescriptions' alone that necessary minimum 'control over human conduct' and 'integration in terms of sentiments and beliefs' is achieved.

This postulate contains two related but separable assumptions. First that certain functions are indispensable in the sense that unless they are performed (e.g integration) the society will not persist. This, as Merton says, sets forth a concept of functional pre-requisites, or pre-conditions necessary for society. Second that certain cultural or social form is indispensable for fulfilling each of these functions. This involves concept of irreplaceable structures. Considering the complex and differentiated societies the same social item may have multiple functions and the same function may be diversely fulfilled by alternative items. Merton considers that there is a range of variation in the structures which fulfill the functional needs which are to be fulfilled.

Thus, after reviewing these possibilities in the complex and differentiated societies, Merton states, in contrast to the assumption of indispensability, that there is then the concept of functional alternatives, or functional equivalence or functional substitutes. In this Merton finds, as stated also earlier, two propositions. One asserts the indispensability of certain functions which

gives rise to the concept of functional necessity or functional pre-requisites. The other asserts the indispensability of social institutions, cultural forms. This, after examination, gives rise to the concept of functional alternatives, equivalence or substitutes. It is this analysis where lies Merton's contribution.

#### **4.6 MERTON'S PARADIGM FOR FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS IN SOCIOLOGY**

We have seen so far that Merton has started from clarifying the etymological meanings and uses of the term, and how the term has been borrowed from biological sciences. He distinguishes among various connotations, how it was used by anthropologists and examined how far their notions were correct and applicable. Merton puts all vocabularies, postulates, concepts, ideological imputations, etc. together. In short, he presents a codification of functional theory in sociology till his times. He presents a list of eleven points which he calls a 'paradigm'. This includes the possibility of further use of functional analysis in understanding contemporary societies. In this, he provides a 'codified guide' for adequate and fruitful functional analysis; leads us directly to the crucial postulates and assumptions underlying functional analysis; and he seeks to sensitize the researcher sociologists not only limit to their scientific implications of various types of functional analysis but also to their political and their ideological implications i.e. it pre-supposes an implicit outlook, and points at which it has bearing an "social engineering" (reformulation of society).

##### **1. Item(s) to which Functions are imputed**

The items (social or cultural) to which functions can be imputed include an entire range of data. But the requirement is that the object of analysis represents a standardized (i.e. patterned and repetitive) item. Such items are institutional patterns, social roles, processes, cultural patterns, etc. Methodologically, it entails that items must be described 'as fully and as accurately'. In this sense, Merton lists a range of items to which functions can be imputed and suggests method of observation in the empirical situation.

##### **2. Subjective dispositions (motives, purposes)**

Merton clarifies, as has been the case with earlier writers that in functional analysis motivation of individuals in a social system is often and erroneously mixed with the related but

different conception of objective consequences of these attitudes, belief and behaviour. In functional analysis, it is the objective consequences which is important rather than the motives, beliefs and psychological dispositions as such.

### **3. Objective Consequences (functions, dysfunctions)**

Merton writes that earlier anthropologists used to confine their observations only to positive consequences of social or cultural items. Secondly, they used to mix up motives with objective category of function. He eliminates this distinction by clarifying the concept of the positive and the negative consequences. He clarifies that there are multiple consequences (functions) and a net balance of consequences.

Functions – are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system; Dysfunctions - are those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system.

There is also an empirical possibility of consequences which are irrelevant to the system. To such, he calls non-functional consequences. At any instance, an item may have both functions and dysfunctions. This gives rise to a problem of assessing the net balance of the consequences. There is another problem of items when the subjective aim-in-view (motives) concedes the objective consequences and the other in which they are separate. For clarification of this, he has introduced the twin concept of manifest and latent functions.

**1. Manifest Functions** - are those observed consequences contributing to adjustment or adaptation of the system which are intended and recognized by the participants in the system.

**2. Latent Functions-** are those which are neither intended nor recognized. From these clear expositions of Merton, a further logical possibility arises. The positive, consequences (functions) may be manifest and also latent; likewise, the negative consequences (dysfunctions) may be manifest and also latent. Thus, it gives a logical classification one – manifest functions (positive consequences which are intended and recognized), two – latent functions (which make for the adaptation, but neither intended nor recognized); third – manifest dysfunctions (negative consequences which are intended and recognized); and fourth – latent dysfunctions (which are

neither intended or recognized but somewhere from behind lessen the adaptation or adjustment of a given system).

#### **4. Unit(s) Sub served by the Function**

This refers to, as stated earlier, the difficulties coming by confining analysis to functions fulfilled for the society. Items may be functional for some sub-groups or individuals and dysfunctional for others. Therefore, this suggests that we consider a range of units for which the item has designated consequences, e.g. individuals in statuses, subgroups or larger social system.

#### **5. Functional Requirements (needs, pre-requisites)**

According to Merton's analysis, every system – social or cultural – has certain needs, which are to be fulfilled. He calls these as the requirements of a system. If these are not fulfilled, the system may not survive or continue. What are these requirements or needs this has always been debatable. But all agree on “the conditions of survival” of a given system like one of the earlier functionalist Malinowski to include “biological and social needs”. Merton further poses a problem on the types of these needs (e.g. universal vs. specific) which may come at some stage in conflict.

#### **6. Mechanisms through which Functions are fulfilled**

In the light of the above analysis of the concept of function, Merton calls for a ‘concrete and detailed’ account of the mechanisms which operate to perform a designated function. This refers to social mechanism, e.g. role segmentation, hierarchic ordering of values, social division of labour, etc. This consideration of mechanisms by Merton indicates the social structure of a society – namely structural units. By implication it may be stated that the needs of a society are fulfilled through arrangement of units inherent in it. Merton indicates that sociologists need to discover methodological problems in observing the operation of these mechanisms.

#### **7. Functional Alternatives (equivalents, substitutes)**

As Merton condemned the postulate of functional indispensability of social items, in

particular social structures, we immediately need to look at functional alternatives or substitutes. This he states, focuses attention on the range of possible variation in the items which can fulfill the functional requirements. It indicates the search for identify what exists and may be inevitable. This requires rigorous experimentation.

## **8. Structural Context (or structural constraint)**

The items in a social structure are not unlimited. That means choice of an item as a substitute of earlier one is limited to the range of variation in the items which can fulfill that designated function. The inter-dependence of elements, says Merton, of a social structure limits the effective change or functional alternatives. This limitation of choice operates in a structural context. This is said by someone as “principle of limited possibilities”. Failure to recognize this limitation leads to utopian thought. This fundamental rule has been recognized by theorists of various different streams, whether Marxists or Functionalists.

## **9. Dynamics and Change**

Functionalists have been alleged that they neglect change as they always emphasize on stability, maintenance and integration. Merton, by introducing the concept of dysfunctions and functional alternatives, provides sufficient ground to understand change within the framework of functional analysis. Thus, he has asserted that only statics is not inherent in the functional theory. Concept of dysfunction – implies stress, strain and tension at structural level – provides an analytical approach to the study of dynamics and change. He poses question about procedures to measure tension, stress and strain as well as the probable directions of social change.

## **10. Problems of Validation of Functional Analysis**

Merton points out that attention has been paid to the specific points at which assumptions, imputations and observations must be validated. He suggests that not only we observe what we assume, but what we observe on that assumption, (e.g. parts of structure) must be real (validated) and appropriate. This needs appropriate and rigorous procedures of analysis which nearly approximate the logic of experimentation. Here he suggests, for validation, possibilities of

comparative (cross- cultural and cross-group) analysis. It is through these comparisons we may validate the facts and the analysis.

### **11. Problem of the Ideological Implications**

Though by arguing on the basis of several evidences, he tried to establish that functional analysis has no intrinsic commitment to an ideological position. But this is not the fact that a particular functional analysis may have an identifiable ideological role. It affects the ideas of the researcher to look at the society and its analysis. His assumptions, concepts limit the range of inferences drawn from the data. He poses the questions, how does one detect the ideological tinged of a functional analysis, to extend an ideology stems from the basic assumptions and is the incidents of these assumptions related to the status and research role of sociologists. He leaves this still problematic.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

1. **Merton reformulates the postulates of functionalism in his book:**
  - a) Social Theory and Social structure
  - b) The Sociology of Science
  - c) On Theoretical Sociology
  - d) Varieties of political expression in Sociology
2. **Merton stated that there are some consequences, which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system. These consequences are called**
  - a) Non-functions
  - b) Dysfunctions
  - c) Latent functions
  - d) Manifest functions

**3. According to R K. Merton, Manifest functions are those which are unintended and unrecognized (True or False).**

The above narration summarizes, systematizes, and clarifies the various assumptions of functionalism as advanced by Merton. He reformulates the concepts, introduces new application of functional analysis in the social contexts and enhances the reputation of functional analysis as the study and explanation of change is also possible in complex and differentiated societies of twentieth century. He also provides a guide for researchers who use functional analysis. Basically, that follows from his frame work of ‘functions and dysfunctions’ and ‘manifest and latent functions’. He provides a descriptive protocol for observation of the social patterns when to analyze by functional perspective. He gives following set of points for observation which facilitates functional analysis (it may serve as a guide for observation).

- (1) Researcher sociologist, to find the locations of the participants within the social structure – that means all participants are not located alike but they are located differently in the social structure – i.e differential participation of the participating persons.
- (2) Researcher sociologist to consider alternative modes of behaviour, excluded by (over) emphasis on the observed pattern that means attention be given not only to what (apparently seems) occurs but also to what is neglected by virtue of the existing pattern (we become used to a pattern which is frequently or repeatedly occurs but forget or neglect what does not come to forefront clearly).
- (3) Researcher sociologist to observe the emotive (sentimental) and cognitive (knowledge) meanings attached by the participants to that pattern (the way the action takes place in open).
- (4) Researcher sociologist to make a distinction between the motivations for participating in the pattern (how certain person or persons psychologically agree to participate) and the objective behaviour (what is apparent and observable by others) involved in the pattern.
- (5) Researcher sociologist to observe the regularities of behaviour not recognized by participants (themselves) but which are nonetheless associated with the central pattern .

## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

Thus, R.K. Merton, as critique of the earlier functionalists, reformulates the functional theory by tracing vocabularies, critically evaluating the assumptions, clarifying the terms and introducing new ones, codifying and providing a guide for sociologist who follows functional analysis in sociology. He incorporates change and process. The most important feature of Merton's analysis, which sets him apart from traditional functionalists, is his treatment of integration as problematic and contingent, not as given. He visualizes differing degrees of normative integration from complete consensus to complete dis-consensus. Of course, the extreme poles are only analytical possibilities, rarely occurring in empirical reality.

Despite all these contributions on certain points, he remains limited. He makes little progress in specifying what "functional pre-requisites" are, that can be served in variety of ways. Neither he gives a definitive statement on this nor does he provide any concrete list of his own. For mechanisms to fulfill these requirements there are arrangements of structure and processes but if these mechanisms are destroyed, then there is no clear-cut statement but he only writes 'the observer is sensitized to the need for detecting compensating mechanisms (if any) which fulfill the necessary function. A full functionalist theory of society would require comparable steps; but though Merton clarifies these, he does not himself fulfill it. Another criticism comes from an Indian philosopher who say logically world may be classified in positive and negative or manifest and latent, what remains, it is an over-simplification of the classification principle. But despite some of such limitations and criticism his contribution to functional theory in sociology remains most acknowledged and recognized.

## 4.8 GLOSSARY

1. **Merton's definition of Function:** Functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system.
2. **Latent Function:** Those functions which are unintended and unrecognized.

#### 4.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write in detail about the three postulates given by R.K. Merton.

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2. Elaborate the concept of function in your words by giving examples.

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3. Discuss Merton's Paradigm for functional analysis in Sociology.

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#### 4.10 LESSON END EXERCISE

##### Multiple Choice Questions

1. **According to Merton's Strain Theory, which of the following responses to societal strain involves rejecting both the goals and the means to achieve them?**
  - a) Conformity
  - b) Innovation
  - c) Ritualism
  - d) Retreatism
  
2. **Which of the following is not one of Merton's critiques of functionalism?**
  - a) The idea that all social structures are indispensable to the survival of the system.
  - b) The belief that all social structures must be beneficial for the whole society.
  - c) The emphasis on latent functions and dysfunctions, which are not always intended.
  - d) The assertion that all social structures must be functionally indispensable.
  
3. **Match the following:**

1. Manifest function	a) Unintended consequence
2. Latent function	b) Different roles associated with single status
3. Social dysfunction	c) Consequence which lessen the adjustment of society
4. Role set	d) Intended consequence

  
  - a) 1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-d
  - b) 1-a, 2-b, 3-c, 4-d
  - c) 1-b, 2-c, 3-d, 4-a
  - d) 1-d, 2-a, 3-c, 4-b

**Answer Key: 1-d, 2-c, 3-d**

#### **4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (II ed.1957), pp: 20-22.
2. R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (II ed.1957), pp: 20-22.
3. R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (II ed.1957), p:51.
4. R.K. Merton, *ibid.* p:25.
5. R.K. Merton, *ibid.* p:30.
6. R.K. Merton, *ibid.* p:36.
7. R.K. Merton, *ibid.* p:50.
8. Piotr Sztompka, *Robert K. Merton: An Intellectual Profile*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1986, pp:126-36
9. Ruth A. Wallace and Alison Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing The Classical Tradition*, (1986), New Jersey, Englewood, pp: 64-65.

#### **4.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-a, 2-b 3-False**

**THE IDEA OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE:**

**A. R. RADCLIFFE BROWN**

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**STRUCTURE**

**5.0 Learning Objectives**

**5.1 Introduction**

**5.2 Structural Functionalism**

**5.3 The Idea of Social Structure in Radcliffe-Brown's Work**

**5.4 Social Structure and Social Organization**

**5.5 Social Structure and Social Institutions**

**5.6 Structural Continuity and Structural Form**

**5.7 Critique of Radcliffe- Brown's Concept of Social Structure**

**5.8 Let us Sum Up**

**5.9 Glossary**

**5.10 Self-Assessment Questions**

**5.11 Lesson End Exercise**

**5.12 Suggested Readings**

**5.13 Answers to check your progress**

## **5.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson you will be able to:**

- **understand Radcliffe Brown Concept of Social Structure;**
- **understand the theory and method used by him in his theory; and**
- **know about the various components of social structure.**

## **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown was an anthropologist of Britain, systematically and most explicitly introduced the idea of structure in social-anthropology which has been followed in Sociology. His formulation of Social Structure as a theory and method of analysis in Sociology and social anthropology emerged as a critique of the over emphasized and till those times prevalent theories of evolution and diffusion. Here we shall take note of these moorings, short comings of which provided ground for new theory and method, “Social Structure”, which was explicitly introduced by Radcliffe- Brown. But prior to that a brief biographic note is given, then the early academic background of prevalent theory will be presented. There after we shall note in detail the idea of social structure as Propounded by Radcliffe-Brown. The purpose and related concepts and the heuristic importance of the social structure will be described later. Everywhere one very theoretical formulation there are critiques, commentaries, applications of and by peers and later scholars, that part on Radcliffe-Brown’s idea of social structure will be noted towards the end.

## **5.2 STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM**

Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory that attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on the relationships between the various social institutions that makes up society (e.g., government, law, education, religion etc.)

Structural Functionalism is a theoretical understanding of society that puts social systems as the collective means to fill society’s needs. In order for social life to survive and develop in society there are a number of activities that need to be carried out to ensure that certain needs are fulfilled. In the structural functionalist model, individuals produce necessary goods and services in various institutions and roles that correlate with the norms of the society. Thus, one of the key

ideas in Structural Functionalism is that society is made-up of groups or institutions, which are cohesive, share common norms, and have a definitive culture.

Gender inequality offers a good illustration. According to Structural Functionalist thought, a woman being subordinate to men allows the cogs of society to function smoothly as everyone in the society knows his or her respective positions in the hierarchy. The implication, of course, is that, because society is functioning smoothly with gender stratification, such stratification is acceptable and efforts should not be made to change the arrangement. This example illustrates that Structural Functionalism is generally seen as being supportive of the status quo.

Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown developed the concept of synchronic functional analysis of culture which was concerned with present and now. In their view the purpose of comparison was to explore socio-cultural institutions of present-day societies in terms of their socio-cultural similarities.

Radcliffe-Brown who had used the term function earlier than Malinowski was not ready to accept Malinowski, who claimed himself as the father of functionalism on the basis of theory of need for which culture, either in past or at present was functional instrument. Radcliffe-Brown put great emphasis upon distinguishing on the structural function from the function of Malinowski and others. According to Brown the only acceptable definition of function was, 'the contribution an institution makes to the maintenance of social structure'. The gap in opinions of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski become so wider that Brown and his associates established a separate school of thought known as Structural-Functional School of Anthropological thought. As the concepts of structure become wedded with function, this school is also known as Structural Functional school. The Structural Functional Theory also got acceptance in America by the sociologist and anthropologists, while in French, Emile Durkheim and Levi Strauss developed Structural-Functional theory to a great extent.

Structural Functional School is divided into three main groups, namely, British School of Structural Functionalism, American School of Structural Functionalism and French School of Structuralism. The names of contributors of Structural Functionalism School of Anthropology are given below:

The concept of structure and function was first given by Herbert Spencer in his book, *Principles of Sociology* (1885, Vol.1), where he talked about fundamental similarities between 'organism' and 'society'. He treated society as integrated order of parts like an organism in which parts are interrelated and integrated in order to provide the structure of that particular society. These different unites of the society contribute valuable functions as a integrated whole for the existence of society and maintenance of social order. This view of Spencer had made him structural functionalist.

The concept of structure and function also appeared in the writings of Emile Durkheim, French anthropologists in his book entitled "Division of Labour" (1893) and in the *Roles of Sociological Method* (1895). Durkheim is of the view that structural unites of society such as family, political, religion, kinship, economic organization contribute valuable functions for maintaining the order of the society. The term social structure is defined by many anthropologists and sociologists.

According to the sociologist Talcott Parsons, "Social Structure is a term applied to particular arrangement of interrelated institutions, agencies and social patterns as well as status and roles which each person assumes in the group".

Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown the chief pioneer of British School of Structural Functionalism opines that "components of social structure are human beings, the structure itself being an arrangement of persons in relationship institutionally defined and regulated".

### **5.3 THE IDEA OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN RADCLIFFE-BROWN'S WORK**

The Concept of Social Structure In the decade following World War II, the concept of social structure became very fashionable in social anthropology. The concept has a long history, though, and has been used by scholars in different senses. i) The original English meaning of the word structure refers to building constructions. The concept of structure in the sense of building or construction can be discerned in early Marxist literature. Marx spoke of the relations of production as constituting the economic 'structure'. Marx and Engels were profoundly influenced by the evolutionist Morgan whose book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871) may be described as the first anthropological study of social structure. ii) By the 16th century the word structure came to be used in anatomy. Herbert Spencer, who had an anatomical image of society in mind, brought the terms 'structure' and 'function' into sociology. This image is also to be found in the work of Durkheim from whom Radcliffe-Brown drew many of his ideas. Following Radcliffe Brown a number of British scholars like Evans-Pritchard, Fortes and Forde concentrated on certain formal aspects of, society like the political structure and kinship structure. Another dimension of the concept of structure can be seen in the work of the French structuralist Levi-Strauss. His view of structure has been drawn from linguistics and denotes an abstract, analytical model against which empirical systems are compared. Certain patterns or regularities are then discerned and explained.

According to Radcliffe-Brown, the basic requirement of any science is a body of coherent concepts. These concepts are to be denoted by technical terms that are accepted and used in the same sense by all the students of the subject. For instance, physicists use terms like 'atom', 'molecule', 'combustion' etc. The meanings and usages of these terms do not change from student to student. Can the same thing be said about sociology and social anthropology? Radcliffe-Brown points out that in anthropological literature, the same word is used in the same sense by different writers and many terms are used without precise definition. This shows the immaturity of the science.

He says that confused, unscientific thinking may be avoided by constantly keeping in mind a clear picture of the nature of the empirical reality to be studied. All concepts and theories must be linked to this reality. According to Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 167), “the empirical reality with which social anthropology has to deal, by description, by analysis and in comparative studies is the process of social life of a certain limited region during a certain period of time”. What does this “process of social life” consist of? Well, it involves the various actions of human beings, particularly joint actions and interactions. For example, in rural Indian society, we could speak of agricultural activities as ‘joint actions.’ The activities of youth clubs, women’s organisations, co-operative societies etc. also imply joint actions.

To provide a description of social life, the social anthropologist must identify certain general features. For example, when a sociologist studies agricultural activities in rural India, he/she will try to derive its general features. How, when and by whom are these activities performed? How do various persons co-operate and interact during the processes of sowing, transplanting, harvesting, threshing and marketing the produce? Some general features that the sociologist could identify could include the composition of agricultural labourers, the role played by women and so on. It is these generalised descriptions which constitute the data of the science. These may be obtained through various methods - participant observation, historical records etc.

Do these general features remain the same over time? Well, different features may hang at different rates. Taking the example given above, we can see that agricultural activities have exhibited a number of changes over the years. The availability of agricultural labourers has declined to some extent. Unlike in the past, they resist brutal exploitation. Increasingly, machines, fertilisers, pesticides etc. are being used. Despite these changes, we can still say that in most parts of the country, women continue to do backbreaking work on the field without getting due recognition for it. Any anthropological description, which accounts for changes over a period of time, is termed a ‘diachronic’ description. A ‘synchronic’ description, on the other hand, refers to the features of social life at a particular period of time.

Rigorous, clear concepts will, according to Radcliffe-Brown, help social anthropology to develop as a distinctive science; it enables generalisations based on synchronic and diachronic

explanations of social life. In this context, the concept of social structure becomes an important one, helping us to see the entire web of social relationships in a systematic way. Thus, we can gain insights into the way society works and stays integrated.

#### **5.4 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION**

As Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 168) puts it, “the concept of structure refers to an arrangement of parts or components related to one another in some sort of larger unity.” Thus, the structure of the human body at first appears as an arrangement of various tissues and organs. If we go deeper, it is ultimately an arrangement of cells and fluids. 57 Concept of Social Structure Radcliffe Brown in social structures, the basic elements are human beings or persons involved in social life. The arrangement of persons in relation to each other is the social structure. For instance, persons in our country are arranged into castes. Thus, caste is a structural feature of Indian social life. The structure of a family is the relation of parents, children, grandparents etc. with each other. Hence, for Radcliffe-Brown, structure is not an abstraction but empirical reality itself. It must be noted that of other social anthropologists. How does one seek out the structural features of social life? Radcliffe Brown says we must look out for social groups of all kinds, and examine their structure. Within groups, people are arranged in terms of classes, categories, castes etc. A most important structural feature, in Radcliffe Brown’s opinion, is the arrangement of people into dyadic relationships or person-to-person relationships, e.g. master-servant or mother’s brother sister’s son. A social structure is fully apparent during inter-group interactions, and interpersonal interactions. Having had a preliminary look at the concept of social structure, let us see what Radcliffe-Brown meant by social organisation. Structure, as we have seen, refers to arrangements of persons. Organisation refers to arrangements of activities. For instance, whilst studying this Block you have organised your activities, i.e. reading a particular section, attempting the exercises, referring to keywords whenever necessary etc. This is organisation at the individual level. Social organisation is for Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 169) “the arrangement of activities of two or more persons adjusted to give a united combined activity”. For instance, a cricket team consists of bowlers, bat-persons, field persons and a wicket-keeper whose combined

activities make the game possible Radcliffe-Brown illustrates the concepts of structure and organisation with reference to a modern army. To begin with, the structure consists of arrangement of persons into groups: divisions, regiments, companies etc. These groups have an internal arrangement of their own, namely ranks. Thus, we have corporals, majors, colonels, brigadiers etc. The organisation of the army or arrangement of activities can be seen in the allocation of various activities to various persons and groups. Manning the borders of the land, helping the Government during times of national calamity etc. are some of the activities of an army.

## **5.5 SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONS**

One of the basic premises underlying a social relationship (which, as we have seen, is the building block of social structure) is the expectation that persons will conform to certain norms or rules. An institution refers to an established, socially recognised system of norms and behaviour patterns concerned with some aspect of social life. A society's family-related institutions, for example, set down acceptable patterns of behaviour to which family members are expected to conform. In our society, a child is expected to show respect to the parents; the parents are expected to support and care for the child as well as aged members of the family and so on. Institutions, in Radcliffe-Brown's (1958:175) words, "define for a person how he is expected to behave and also how he may expect others to behave". Of course, individuals do violate these rules from time to time and various sanctions exist to cope with deviations. According to Radcliffe Brown, social structure has to be described in terms of the institutions, which regulate the relationships between persons or groups. As he puts it, "the structural features of social life of a particular region consist of all those continuing arrangements of persons in institutional relationships, which are exhibited in the actions, and interactions that in their totality make up the social life."

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. Structural functional school is divided into three main groups. These are:**

A) -----

B) -----

C) -----

**2. “Principles of Sociology” is a book written by**

a) Radcliffe Brown

b) Malinowski

c) Herbert Spencer

d) Talcott Parsons

**3. Give the definition of Structure as given by Radcliffe Brown in two lines.**

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**5.6 STRUCTURAL CONTINUITY AND STRUCTURAL FORM**

If, as Radcliffe-Brown describes it, social structure refers to an arrangement of persons, we could conclude that once the persons die or disappear structure must also disappear. This, however, is not the case. Individuals may come and go, but structure persists or continues. For example, social groups, classes, castes, have an ever-changing membership. They lose members by death and gain new ones by birth. For example, the Lok Sabha may lose members who may die, resign, or lose the next election, but they will soon be replaced by new ones. A tribal chief may die, but soon a successor takes his place. At this stage, we must highlight the distinction made by Radcliffe-Brown between social structure and structural form. As we have seen above, the social structure is always in a state of flux. Individuals are born and die, the composition of society is ever-changing. Radcliffe-Brown argues that although social structures are in flux, the structural form is comparatively stable. This structural form is reflected in the ‘social usage’ or norms

widely observed. These social usages persist, even though persons come and go. The stability of this structural form depends on how well integrated its parts are (e.g. family, educational system, political system etc.) and the performance by these parts of the special tasks necessary to maintain it. For instance, the special task of the family is the rearing and socialisation of children. Educational institutions impart training; the political system is concerned with governance. These tasks refer to 'functions' of the parts of the system. We will study Radcliffe Brown's notion of 'function' in detail in the next unit. As a word of caution, it may be said that Radcliffe-Brown's distinction between social structure and social form is not made absolutely clear even in his own writings, where the latter comes out as synonymous with social organisation. In a nutshell, 'social structure', an important social anthropological concept developed by Radcliffe-Brown, refers to empirically observable phenomena, namely, arrangements or relationships of the members of a society. There is an organisational aspect as well, which refers to a pattern of arranging the activities people engage in. Social structure involves institutions, which define socially acceptable rules and modes of inter personal behaviour. Social structure is constantly in a state of flux, but the structural form an abstract concept taking into account social usages is relatively stable. Its stability depends on how effectively its component parts carry out their 'functions'. Thus far, we have been talking about social structure in a rather abstract way. The best way to make these ideas crystal clear is through an example. Radcliffe-Brown's field studies took him to various parts of the world from the Andaman Islands to Africa and to Australia. We will now focus upon the structural system of the tribes of the Western Australia as studied by Radcliffe-Brown. This will clearly demonstrate to you how social relationships help to build up the social structure.

## **5.7 CRITIQUE OF RADCLIFFE-BROWN'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

The idea of social structure as given by Radcliffe Brown has been used by later sociologists/anthropologists but it has also been subjected to criticism. Some criticisms may be noted here.

1. It is wrong to consider society as a living organism, because the structure of living organism does not change but society changes.
2. What he says that social structure is a reality, the very error arises when we assume that this reality is an abstraction of social situation.
3. His perspective does not consider change. In this way it supports status quo of societies, domination of those who are dominating over others.
4. Social structure treats social order as an integral whole. All the time it is not true. A society can be seen in disequilibrium and state of imbalance for a long time then at that time the idea of 'integral whole' is questioned.

## **5.8 LET US SUM UP**

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, a prominent social anthropologist, viewed social structure as an organized system of social relationships that provides stability and continuity to a society. He emphasized that social structure is not merely a physical arrangement of individuals, but a network of enduring relationships that dictate how people interact and fulfill social roles. Radcliffe-Brown's concept of social structure is closely linked to structural-functionalism, where he analyzed how various social institutions and relationships function together to maintain social order.

## **5.9 GLOSSARY**

1. According to Radcliffe-Brown, structure refers to an arrangement of parts or components related to one another in some sort of larger unity.
2. For Radcliffe-Brown, structure is not an abstraction but empirical reality itself.

## **5.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Give a detail account of A.R Radcliffe Brown Idea of Social Structure.

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2. Write in brief about the various components of social structure.

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3. Discuss in brief about Personality, Individual and Person.

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### 5.11 LESSON END EXERCISE

#### Multiple Choice Questions

**1. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown is best known for pioneering which theoretical approach in anthropology.**

- a) Symbolic interactionism
- b) Structural functionalism
- c) Neo-Marxism

d) Ethnomethodology

**2. According to Radcliffe-Brown, what was the primary function of social institutions.**

- a) To foster individual creativity and expression
- b) To maintain the stability and order of the overall social system
- c) To facilitate social change and adaptation
- d) To provide emotional satisfaction to individuals

**3. Radcliffe Brown did not differentiate between social structure and-----**

**4. According to Radcliffe Brown, the concept of ..... refers to an arrangement of parts or components related to one another.**

**5. Which of the following is a key work by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown focusing on his structural-functional perspective.**

- A) The Elementary Structures of Kinship
- B) Argonauts of the Western Pacific
- C) Social Theory and Social Structure
- D) Structure and Function in Primitive Society

**Answer Key: 1-b, 2-b, 3-social relations, 4-Structure, 5-d**

## **5.12 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- T. B. Bottomore 1971 (II ed. Indian reprint) Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature, New Delhi, Blackie and son, p:113.
- A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, Structure and Function in Primitive Society, London, Cohen and West, Chapter X, pp:188-204.

## **5.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 2-c**

**Lesson-6**

**THE PROBLEM OF ROLE ANALYSIS: S. F. NADEL**

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**STRUCTURE**

**6.0 Learning Objectives**

**6.1 Introduction**

**6.2 Theory of Social structure**

**6.3 Definition of social structure**

**6.4 Social Behaviour**

**6.5 Role Analysis**

**6.6 Nadel's role classification**

**6.7 Criticism**

**6.8 Let us Sum up**

**6.9 Glossary**

**6.10 Self-Assessment Questions**

**6.11 Lesson End Exercise**

**6.12 Suggested Readings**

**6.13 Answers to check your progress**

## 6.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, after going through this lesson you will be able:

- To understand about the concept of Role Analysis;
- To know about Role behaviour; and
- To examine Nadel's role classification.

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Nadel was born in 1903 in Vienna but spent most of his academic career in England, where he studied with Malinowski. He was trained in psychology and music, but made his contributions in Sudanese ethnography. His works in this field include *A Black Byzantium* (1942) and *The Nuba* (1947). He also brought an uncharacteristic concern for theoretical rigour to the resolutely empiricist tradition of British anthropology, particularly in his two last books, *The Foundations of Social Anthropology* (1951), and the Posthumous *Theory of Social Structure* (1957). Here, we would like to discuss his important contribution on the theory of social structure.

## 6.2 THEORY OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Nadel was a close associate of Professor Radcliffe-Brown. He developed the theory of social structure in his book entitled, *Theory of Social Structure* (1957). In this book, Nadel pointed out that the concept of society may be viewed from two angles: (i) action such as kinship and economics, and (ii) groupings such as family, clans. He also says that there are some social and cultural facts which fall outside the social and cultural scheme. These refer to an action autonomous.

Nadel held view that the concept of social structure is still in a sense on trial. The variety of definitions leads us to fear that it is a concept the width of whose usages renders it analytically fruitless. Thus, there are two choices open to us. We may remove the concept of structure from the

vocabulary of anthropology on account of its lack of precision or we can attempt to narrowly define it by giving a specific and limited connotation.

### **6.3 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Nadel has tried to explain in his definition that structure refers to a definable articulation, an ordered arrangement of parts. It is related to outer aspect of society and is totally unconcerned with the functional aspect of society. He has emphasized that *social structure refers to the network of social relationship which is created among the human beings when they interact with each other, according to their status in accordance with the patterns of society*. Nadel, therefore, says that structure indicates an transportable being relatively invariants, while the parts themselves are variable. According to him, there are three elements of society: (i) a group of people, (ii) institutionalized rules according to which members of the group interact, and (iii) an institutionalized pattern or expression of these interactions. The institutionalized rules or patterns do not change easily and this creates an orderliness in society. These rules determine the status and rules of the individuals. There is an order among these rules and status also which provide an ordered arrangement of human beings.

Nadel opines that we are all surely agreed and there is no great difficulty involved in arriving at a general acceptable minimal definition of structure. Structure is the formal relation of parts such that a set of data may be said to exhibit structure in as much as they exhibit a definable articulation, an ordered arrangement of parts. The difficulties begin when we attempt to extrapolate this minimal definition from its purely formal sense to its supposed applications to sociological data. It is not difficult to see that technical problems which confront especially Radcliffe-Brown and Levi-Strauss occur at this point in their analysis. The jump from definition to application, in other words, is crucial one.

According to Nadel, there are three dichotomies to resolve which aspects of structure are:

### **6.3.1 Structure as opposed to function,**

### **6.3.2 Structure as opposed to qualitative character, and**

### **6.3.3 Structure as opposed to process.**

Unless we resolve these dichotomies, we are unable to give a satisfactory account of social structure.

Thus, according to Nadel, “we arrive at the structure of society through abstracting from the concrete population and its behaviour that pattern or network (or system) of relationships obtaining between actors in their capacity of playing roles relative to one another. In this context, we analyse two important aspects of social structure, namely, social behaviour and Role.

## **6.4 SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

Social behaviour, by definition, involves stereo-typed or relatively determinate ways of action within groups, between groups, and over periods of time, hence the continuity of group. Social behaviour, in other words, is institutionalized. The institutionalized behaviour is characterized by the consistency of the relationships of which it is composed. But it must be made clear that what is constant is not concrete behaviour itself. It carries in detail according to occasion and circumstances, but its general character which allows it to be subsumed in an identical category of relationship, for example, friendship, respect relationship, joking relationship etc. or within specific cultures or sub-cultures, for example the child-parent relationship or avuncular relationships, which are clearly bound by the convention of particular society. We may note that all these cases contain an element of abstraction; they are all categories which we infer from a number of observed sequences of action. Thus, we cannot ignore the qualitative aspects of such relationship or their content in favour of their formal aspects. This is in fact; we cannot do, for distinguishing for example friendship from love or loyalty, or respect from servility. It is precisely this effective element, which is the criteria, by which we distinguish between the categories, even when we express these criteria in behavioural terms.

Therefore, the problem is to find a way of expressing the relationship between individuals acting as individuals and as their acting as part of a social network. The key to this is clearly that in most social contexts the actors behave in conscious or unconscious accord with some set of rules, beliefs, or expectations about the situations or conventions. We speak, that is to say, of individuals enacting roles. According to Nadel, it is through relationships in virtue of roles that society is arranged and ordered. Therefore, social structure lies not in mere presence and collection of relationships, but in the order in which they appear. According to him, there are two levels of order one, within a particular relationship and which accounts for the constancy and identity of that relationship, and the other between all these various relationships.

## **6.5 ROLE ANALYSIS**

Linton put forward a simple two-fold classification dividing roles into those which are ascribed (assigned to individuals without reference to their innate differences or abilities) and those which are achieved (left open to be filled through competition and individual effort). The criteria for ascribed roles must be evident at birth, making it possible to begin training immediately and eliminating all uncertainty. Such criteria are those of sex, age, kinship relations, and birth into a particular class or caste. Achieved roles, however are given to the people whose individual performance qualifies them as the most meritorious. This classification is based on the mode of allocation of roles.

Another procedure is to classify roles according to the principal social domains in which they are exercised. An example is Aidan Southall's fivefold division: kinship and ethnic, economic, political, ritual or religious, and recreational. Nadel tries to marry Linton's distinction with this sort of scheme. For various reasons he prefers to treat ascribed roles as part of more general category of 'recruitment roles', but it is not necessary to recapitulate this argument. In table-1 a reproduce modified version of this classification, substituting in certain places more familiar terminology. One difficulty, Nadel recognizes, is that some roles are paired together while others can be played by themselves. The role of a doctor is a paired or 'relational' role because it is invariably associated with that of creditor and apart from this interrelation neither role has nay

general significance. The role of husband similarly has meaning almost exclusively in connection with that of wife, the role of friend with friend etc. Yet some roles, like king, poet, Christian, scholar, can be opposed only to so large a public that they define a pattern of expected behaviour rather than a social relationship. These are non-relational roles. It will be noticed that according to Nadel sex roles belong in the latter category, which is perhaps arguable, but at least a consideration of the difficulties created by such differences will show how hard it is to include all kinds of role within any one scheme.

Nadel's classification of roles is, as he says, 'based mainly on their content, i.e. on the particular conduct they are meant to imply'. This has hitherto been the usual approach to the problem. By role differentiation is meant the extent to which incumbency of one role is independent of incumbency of other roles. For example, the role of golfer is highly differentiated from the rest of the social structure; anyone can play golf, men and women, young and old, of whatever religion, race, class or occupation. By comparison, the role of priest is tied into the social structure very closely; only men of a certain disposition and education are acceptable, and once ordained their role restricts their social participation. This is a contrast in the extent to which different roles are differentiated from other roles in the sense that they can be organized independently.

## 6.6 NADEL'S ROLE CLASSIFICATION

TABLE - 1

Ascribed roles		Ascribed roles			Relational	
Non-relational	Relational	Non-relational			Symmetrical	Asymmetrical
		Proprietary	Expressive	Service		
Age, sex, race and Descent	Kinship	Smith, diviner, sage, and other Roles characterised by the	Demonstrator, artist, orator, and similar roles indicating belief, cre-	Teacher, salesman, labourer, and other occupa-tional roles	Colleague, partner, rival	Manager, leader, patron, etc.; hierarchical roles and those paired

Possession of skills, resources, or Learning	ativeness, or communica- Tion	with them.
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In studying the role of physician, the sociologists is not concerned with the application of medical skills as a matter of technical expertise, but with the implications of professional skills for the organization of medicine; with the relations of the doctor to his colleagues, his collaborators (nurses, technicians, etc.), and his patients; with the relations of patients to hospital staff, to one another, to their families etc. The content of role is often among the data that the sociologists have to take as given; he considers the implications of different ways of organizing tasks rather than the tasks themselves. For example, if general practitioners refer all their more unusual cases for specialist attention in hospitals this may reduce their interest in their own practice and lead to lower standards of care. The question of how medical skills are best deployed is sociological but the problem of how a particular patient is best treated is not. How the sociologist's approach diverges from the social psychologists can be illustrated by reference to studies of role conflict. Social scientists have considered numerous cases in which an individual has to occupy two practically conflicting roles. Social scientists have considered numerous cases in which an individual has to occupy two partially conflicting roles. For example, a military chaplain is both a pastor and someone with the privileges of a commissioned officer; if he is not careful the troops may regard him as more an officer than a pastor. The social psychological studies deal principally with the implications for individuals of conflicting role expectations and with the modes in which conflicts are resolved. A sociological analysis might be expected to consider the implications of conflict (or the absence of conflict) for the social structure. Why is it that, in Britain, women can be ministers of religion in some denominations and not in others? What would be the social consequences of allowing an individual to occupy both the female role and the priestly role? Role combinations of a kind that are voted in the smaller societies are often permitted in urban communities, but as yet there has been no explicit treatment of the issues raised by this kind of comparison. The tendency in some quarters to regard role studies as the property of social psychologists will fade as these sociological perspectives are explored.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I

### **1. Who contributed in Sudanese Ethnography.**

- a) Ralph Linton
- b) Talcott Parsons
- c) S.F Nadel
- d) None of these.

### **2. Who gave two-fold classification of roles i.e. Ascribed roles and Achieved roles.**

- a) Nadel
- b) Ralph Linton
- c) Brown
- d) Malinowski

### **3. Nadel divided Ascribed roles into Relational and Non-relational roles (True or False).**

## **6.7 CRITICISM**

One problem in the classification of roles is the difference between roles that are paired and those that stand virtually by themselves. This leads to place them in separate categories as relational and non-relational, and some such procedure seems inevitable so long as the classification is based upon content. A classification of roles according to their differentiation does not have to treat paired roles separately, through the elements by which it classifies them are often incidental to the main focus of these roles. Kinship roles are always paired. E.g. mother-son, but a mother's behaviour towards her son belongs to the content of the role and is of no significance in

locating her role on the scale. Its placement is decided by the extent to which being a mother of a male child confers prestige, gives a woman the privilege of associating with other mothers, and is relevant to relations with people other than her sons and daughters. While the elimination of content has advantages for certain kinds of role analysis, its disadvantages in other connections will be obvious.

## 6.8 LET US SUM UP

Thus, to sum up Nadel explored the concept of roles in society, emphasizing their importance in understanding social structures and individual behavior. He identified roles as the intermediary between society and individuals, shaped by institutionalized rules that govern interactions.

## 6.9 GLOSSARY

1. **Ascribed Roles** are those roles which an individual is assigned at birth. E.g. Father, mother, brother sister etc.
2. **Achieved role** is a social position or identity that an individual attains through his own efforts, choices, or accomplishments. E.g. Doctor, teacher, lawyer etc.

## 6.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Define Social Structure.

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2. Write a brief note on Role Analysis.

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3. Give a brief account of social behaviour.

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## 6.11 LESSON END EXERCISE

### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

**1. Who is the author of the influential book, The Theory of Social Structure, which details his concept of role analysis?**

- a) Emile Durkheim
- b) Talcott Parsons
- c) S.F. Nadel
- d) Ralph Linton

**. F. Nadel's approach to social structure and roles places him within the structural-functional tradition of anthropology, emphasizing:**

- a) Conflict and change in society
- b) The function and stability of society
- c) Symbolic meanings of interactions
- d) Uncovering universal underlying mental structures

**3. S.F Nadel has classified roles as Pivotal, sufficiently relevant and ----- in his theory of social structure.**

**4. Nadel highlighted that the "role system of any society, with its given coherence, is the \_\_\_\_\_ of its social structure."**

- a) Byproduct
- b) Epiphenomenon
- c) Matrix
- d) Conflict

**5. According to S.F. Nadel, what are the "decisive elements" of social structure.**

- A) Wealth, power, and prestige
- B) Surface rules, roles, and social institutions
- C) Relations of production and economic base
- D) Kinship systems and myths

**Answers: 1-c, 2-b, 3-Peripheral, 4-c, 5-b**

### **6.12 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Banton, Michael (1965), Roles: An Introduction to the Study of Social Relations, London: Tavistock Publications.
2. Nadel, S.F. (1957). The Theory of Social Structure, London: Cohen and West Ltd.

### **6.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-c, 2-b, 3-True.**

**Lesson-7**  
**STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS:**  
**LEVI – STRAUSS**

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**STRUCTURE**

- 7.0 Learning Objectives**
- 7.1 Introduction**
- 7.2 Definition of Social Structure**
- 7.3 Concept of structuralism**
- 7.4 Structural Analysis**
- 7.5 Methodology**
- 7.6 Structuralism and Phenomenology**
- 7.7 Criticism of Structuralism**
- 7.8 Let us Sum Up**
- 7.9 Glossary**
- 7.10 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 7.11 Lesson End Exercise**
- 7.12 Suggested Readings**
- 7.13 Answers to check your progress**

## **7.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- **understand the concept of Structural Analysis;**
- **know about the concept of Social Structure; and**
- **understand the Methodology of Levi-Strauss Theory.**

## **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Claude-Levi-Strauss born in 1908 is the father of structuralism. Structuralism, other than linguistic structuralism, is associated with Levi-Strauss. He is credited to have made an original attempt at theoretical synthesis in the 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology. His work in elementary and complex structures in kinship is unparalleled. Strauss was greatly influenced by B. Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. His variety of structuralism is based on how the mind works. He is expounder of the concept of binary opposition. The mind of man works in such a way that he thinks about binary oppositions. Strauss argues that there are abstract models of thought or formats in the mind of man. He has broadened the concept of structuralism by including all forms of communication. According to him, “structuralism includes a wide range of social phenomena as systems of communication, kinship system and exchange of spouses”. He further says that the real structure is the model, or perhaps the mind.

## **7.2 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Strauss’ definition of structure is simple. He argues that a social structure is not a reality, which can directly be seen. But it is reality that exists beyond the visibility. The function of the structure constitutes the underlying logic of the system, which can be explained by the apparent reality.

Strauss has developed binary opposition out of the data, which has gathered from the field. He asserts that the “man organizes the world in contrasting pairs and develops coherent systems of relationships from such a starting point”. The central element in Levi- Strauss’s perspective is the idea that

“all kinship systems are elaborations on four fundamental kin relationships: brother-sister, husband-wife, father-son and mother’s brother-sister’s son”. He regards this as the elementary social structure.

### **7.3 CONCEPT OF STRUCTURALISM**

The most important work in structuralism as far as sociology is concerned, has been done in anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss. Over the years, he has produced an enormous body of complex work that has dramatically altered the field of anthropology- and other fields as well. Structuralists in sociology have been influenced strongly by Levi-Strauss’s work. One of the reasons for the complexity of Levi-Strauss’s work is that various types of structures are to be found in it. The first type, the large-scale structures and institutions of the social world, is the kind that he took pains to deny are structures. Although these are structural realities to most anthropologists and sociologists, to Levi-Strauss they serve to conceal the real underlying structures of society. This leads to the second, and more important, type of structure in Levi-Strauss’s work, the model that the social scientists construct to get at the underlying structure of society. But there is a third, and most important, type of structure of Live-Strauss, and that is the structure of the human mind (Leach: 1974). The models of the social world that social scientists construct take similar forms in diverse societies because human products around the world have the same basic source, the human mind. It is the structure of the mind that is the ultimate structure in Levi-Strauss’s work.

At one level, Levi-Strauss can be seen as simply extending Sausure’s work on language to anthropological issues- for example, to myths in primitive societies. However, Levi-Strauss went further and applied structuralism more broadly to all forms of communication. His major innovation was to reconceptualize a wide array of social phenomena) for instance, kinship systems as systems of communication and thereby make them amenable to structural analysis (Burriss: 1979). The exchange of spouses, for example, can be analyzed in the same way as the exchange of words. Both are social exchanges that can be studies through the use of structural anthropology.

Levi-Strauss’s (1967) thinking can be illustrated with the examples of the similarities between linguistic systems and kinship systems. First, terms used to describe kinship, like phonemes in language, are basic units of analysis to the structuralist. Second neither the kinship terms nor phonemes have meaning in themselves. Instead, both acquire meaning only when they are integral parts of a larger system. The overall

structure of the system gives each of the component parts meaning. Third, Levi-Strauss admitted that there is empirical variation from setting to setting in both phonemic and kinship systems, but even these variations can be traced to the operation of general, although implicit, laws. Finally, and ultimately in terms of Live-Strauss's sense of structure, both phonemic systems and kinship systems are the products of the structures of the mind. However, they are not the products of a conscious process. Instead, they are the products of the unconscious, logical structure of the mind. These systems, as well as the logical structure of the mind from which they are derived, operate on the basis of general laws.

#### **7.4 STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS**

Levi-Strauss subjected anthropological data to structural analysis in much the same way that Saussure analyzed linguistic data. In contrast, most anthropologists and sociologists, for that matter, are likely to accept the subjective reports of respondents. To Levi-Strauss, such reports are simply the basic sources out of which to construct the underlying structures. In his analysis of primitive societies, Levi-Strauss was interested in uncovering the underlying structure of myths and kinship systems, indeed of the entire society.

Although Levi-Strauss devoted his attention to primitive societies, he believed that all societies, including modern ones, have similar underlying structures. He focused on primitive societies because there is less distortion and it is easier to discover the structure. In modern societies, a series of conscious models, or normative systems, have been developed to conceal the structural reality. Levi-Strauss did not totally denigrate the importance of such models. These normative systems, including their biases and distortions, are important products of people in a society. However, these systems are not of primary importance products of people in a society. However, these systems are not of primary importance, because 'cultural norms are not of themselves structures' (Levi-Strauss:1967).

Most anthropologists study what people say and do, but Levi-Strauss was more concerned with their human products (Rossi: 1974). He was concerned with the objective structure of these products, not their subjective meanings or their origins in subjective processes. In looking at various human products- myths, kinship systems, and others- Levi-Strauss was interested in their interrelationships. The

charting of such interrelationships is the structure or at least a structure. Because a structure is created by the observer, different observers can construct different structures. Two important points need to be understood here. First, structures are the creations of observers. Second, the structures that are created do not exist in the real world. As Levi-Strauss put it, ‘the term social structure has nothing to do with empirical realities but with models which are built up after it (Levi-Strauss:1967)’.

Levi-Strauss was not interested in simply charting the structure of a simple primitive society. Rather, his concern was in comparing a wide array of available data on a number of such societies. He hoped that such comparative analyses would yield an underlying structure common to all societies. Although he searched for such structure, Levi-Strauss did not adopt the dogmatic point of view that structures are the same for all places and for all times. Contrary to the view of most observers, he saw flexibility in his system.

## **7.5 METHODOLOGY**

Levi-Strauss rejected the traditional orientation of anthropologists. For example, he rejected the idea that myths can be explained either by their narrative content or by their functions for society. Instead, the meaning of myths must be sought at the unconscious structural level. Levi-Strauss’s methodology for analysis of myths can be broken down into a series of steps. First, he would examine a number of variants of a particular myth. Second, he would isolate in these variants the basic thematic elements. Third, he would chart the complex patterns in which thematic elements within each variant are interwoven. Fourth, he would construct “a table of possible permutations between these terms (Levi-Strauss:1963). Fifth, the table itself would become the structure, “the general object of analysis which, at this level, only can yield necessary connections, the empirical phenomenon considered at the beginning being only one possible combination among others (Levi- Strauss: 1963). Finally, such a table, or structure, would allow the analyst not only to understand the myth within a particular society.

On the surface, it would appear that Levi-Strauss’s structures are the same as Durkheim’s social facts; both seem to have a life of their own that is external to, and coercive of, the actor. However, Levi-Strauss did not operate at the societal level, at the level of social facts. Levi-Strauss was influenced by Durkheim’s later work on primitive classification rather than his earlier work on

social facts. Levi-Strauss's actors are constrained, but not by social facts. People, in his view, are constrained by the structures of mind.

Perhaps, then, it was Sigmund Freud, not Durkheim, who was closest to Levi- Strauss in orientation and a major influence on his work. It would appear that Levi- Strauss accepted the view of Freudian psychiatry that actors are determined by unconscious forces. Although Levi-Strauss was interested in the unconscious, there is a crucial difference between Levi-Strauss and Freud on this issue (Rossi: 1974). Freud conceived of the unconscious largely in terms of hidden emotional content; actors are seen as impelled by emotions that are unknown to them at a conscious level. However, Levi-Strauss was clearly not interested in the emotional aspects of the unconscious; his focus in the unconscious was "the permanent and logical structures of the mind" (Rossi: 1974). Levi- Strauss's actors are constrained not by unconscious emotions, but by the unconscious, logical structures of their minds.

Levi-Strauss's view, of course, led to a problem common in the social sciences: that the mind is not accessible to immediate observation (Scheffler: 1970). This caused Levi-Strauss to focus on the human products and their interrelationships. Here his interest was not in those products in themselves, but in what they can tell us about the logical structure of the mind. Thus, his studies of the structure of the primitive world in general and kinship and mythical systems in particular are not ends in themselves but rather means to help him understand basic mental structures.

## **7.6 STRUCTURALISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY**

In his search for the basic structures of the mind, it would seem that Levi-Strauss undertook a project resembling those of at least some phenomenologists. However, Levi- Strauss, like most structuralist, had a deep distaste for phenomenology. In his view, phenomenologists seek to place human, subjective consciousness at the center of the social sciences. To structuralists, consciousness is not amenable to scientific analysis. Whereas phenomenologists (and other associated with this approach, such as ethno methodologists and existentialists) are seen as engaged in an effort to humanize the social sciences, structuralists almost self-consciously seek to dehumanize those fields. They want to remove people from the center of the social sciences and substitute various structures, such as the logical structure of the

mind, language, various components of society, or society in general. In view of most structuralists, a focus on their subjective process retards, if not prevents, the development of social science. To engage in a science, the focus must shift from people to some sort of objective structure.

Levi-Strauss's orientation and interest in mental structures would suggest that he was engaged in an enterprise similar to that undertaken by the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Although there are some similarities, there is also a crucial difference between them. As a philosopher, Kant sought to uncover the basic mental categories through introspection or philosophizing or both. As a social scientist, Levi-Strauss rejected such methods and sought instead to examine empirically the structures of the social world, in order to shed light on mental structures.

Thus, although it seems that Levi-Strauss was doing work resembling that of a number of other thinkers, a closer examination indicates important differences between Levi-Strauss and all of them. Indeed, this is a measure of Levi-Strauss's distinctive and important contribution to the social science.

Somewhat harshly, Kurzweil concludes, "structuralism as originally conceived by Levi- Strauss is dead. The universal mental structures have not emerged, albeit no one any longer searches for them (Kurzweil: 1980). Nevertheless, she recognizes that Levi-Strauss laid the groundwork for other types of structuralism as well as post structuralism.

Pierre Bourdieu argued about the neglected aspect of structuralism. He says that there is something more to social life than the subjective consciousness of the actors who move within it and produce it. Levi-Strauss explains structuralism only in terms of the format of mind. Bourdieu contests it. He was motivated to move beyond this by realization that the behaviour, the practice of the people about whom structuralist models were constructed, was at variance with the rules of conduct which those models formulated. His strong argument is that "structuralism had little or no explanatory or predictive power". Thus, the criticism is that structuralism cannot predict the future course of social reality.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

#### **A. Who is considered as the father of Structuralism.**

1. Talcott Parsons
2. Radcliffe Brown
3. S. F Nadel
4. Claude-Levi Strauss

#### **B. Levi Strauss's sense of structure both phonemic and Kinship systems are the products of the structure of**

1. Society
2. Mind
3. Government
4. None of above

**3. Whereas Phenomenologists are seen as engaged to humanize the social sciences, structuralists almost self-consciously seek to dehumanize these fields (True or False).**

### **7.7 CRITICISM OF STRUCTURALISM**

The post-modern theorists such as Lacan, Derrida and Foucault have criticized the structuralism of Levi-Strauss. They have developed the concept of post-modern structuralism. This is different from general structuralism and is, interestingly, rejects general structuralism though it draws heavily from it. Commenting on the nature of post-modern structuralism George Ritzer observes: Post-Structuralism tends to be more abstract, more philosophical and less political than post-modernism. Derrida's post-structuralism is a good example of post-structuralist thinking, even though he seems to be post-modernist sometimes.

Theory of Levi-Strauss has certain positive contributions. It is this theory which provides a valuable distinction between the empirical surplus and the underlying structure. It helps us solve some of

the social science problems of explanation in a world which is changing, complex and particular. At a time when prevailing intellectual fashion tends to go in the direction of relativism and idealism; structuralism provides a midway point.

## **7.8 LET US SUM UP**

Claude Levi-Strauss's primary contribution to anthropology was his theory of structuralism, which proposes that cultural phenomena can be understood by analyzing their underlying, universal structures. He believed that these structures are rooted in the human mind's innate capacity to organize the world through binary oppositions, such as good/evil, male/female, or nature/culture.

Levi-Strauss argued that culture isn't just a random collection of customs and beliefs, but rather a system of signs and symbols that can be analyzed using linguistic principles. He sought to uncover the deep, often unconscious, structures that shape human thought and behaviour. Central to his theory is the concept of binary oppositions. He believed that humans naturally categorize the world through contrasting pairs, and that these oppositions are reflected in cultural practices, myths, and social structures. By examining these oppositions, anthropologists can gain insight into the fundamental logic of a culture. Strauss argued that despite the vast diversity of cultures, there are underlying universal patterns in human thought and social organization. He believed that these patterns are products of the invariant structure of the human mind.

## **7.9 GLOSSARY**

1. According to Levi-Strauss, ‘the term social structure has nothing to do with empirical realities but with models which are built up after it.’

## **7.10 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Write a brief note on Structural Analysis.

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2. Discuss the concept of Structuralism.

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3. Define Social Structure.

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## 7.11 LESSON END EXERCISE

### 1. Match the following:

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Structuralism   | a. An explanation of Kinship system and intergroup relations through marriage and exchange of women to create social bonds.           |
| 2. Alliance Theory | b. The theory that all cultures are shaped by universal, deep patterns in human thinking, often expressed through binary oppositions. |
| 3. Myth Analysis   | c. A structural readings of myths to uncover the universal structures of human thought using mythological units.                      |

4. The Elementary Structures of Kinship d. A seminal book on alliance theory.

Structures of Kinship

- a) 1-b, 2-a, 3-c, 4-d
- b) 1-a, 2-b, 3-c, 4-d
- c) 1-d, 2-b, 3-c, 4-a
- d) 1-a, 2-c, 3-b, 4-d

**2. What is the central concept in Levi-Strauss's structuralism that involves pairs of contrasting elements.**

- a) Kinship systems
- b) Binary oppositions
- c) Structural differentiation
- d) The American dream

**3. Which of Levi-Strauss's major works is renowned for its analysis of kinship systems through a structuralist lens.**

- a) The Savage Mind
- b) Tristes Tropiques
- c) The Elementary Structures of Kinship
- d) Mythologies

**4. According to Levi-Strauss, what is the main function of myths.**

- a) To provide a historical record of a society's past
- b) To preserve cultural traditions for future generations

- c) To act as a framework for resolving contradictions and tensions within a society
- d) To explain scientific phenomena

**5. In his structural analysis, what did Levi-Strauss believe was the primary role of the anthropologist?**

- a) To document and record cultural practices
- b) To analyze the functional aspects of social institutions
- c) To uncover the underlying structures of thought and culture
- d) To translate myths for the public

**Answers: 1-a, 2-b, 3-c, 4-c, 5-c**

**7.12 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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2. Leach, Edmund (1974), *Claude Levi-Strauss*, New York: Penguin.
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**7.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: A-4, B-2, 3- True**

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COURSE NO. SOC-C-202

UNIT - III

Conflict Theory

Lesson No. 8

CRITIQUE OF MARXIAN THEORY OF CONFLICT:

R. DAHRENDORF

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**STRUCTURE**

**8.0 Learning Objectives**

**8.1 Introduction**

**8.2 Ralf Dahrendorf on class & class conflict in Industrial Society**

**8.3 Dahrendorf's image of the social order**

**8.4 Problems in Causal Analysis**

**8.5 Let us Sum up**

**8.6 Glossary**

**8.7 Self-Assessment Questions**

**8.8 Lesson End Exercise**

**8.9 Suggested Readings**

**8.10 Answers to check your progress**

## **8.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson you will be able to:**

- **understand the Ralph Dahrendorf Theory of Class Conflict;**
- **know about the various problems of causal analysis; and**
- **understand Dahrendorf concept of the Social Order.**

## **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

While studying Emile Durkheim on the Division of Labour in semester Ist you have noted that Durkheim considered division of labour as a social fact which contributed to social differentiation. He also stated that the differentiated society and its pathologies could be maintained through organic solidarity. Marx however has something different to say in relation to the role of division of labour. For him, society has been divided into classes because of its absolute dependence on the division of labour which precipitated dominance among the ruling class and subordination among the subjugated class.” (Abraham and Morgan: 35). On the question of class and class antagonism, let us look at the most classical statement of Marx:

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freemen and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeymen in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried in an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in common ruin of the contending classes.”

The above statement we have quoted from the “The Communist Manifesto” (Marx and Engels) and the manifesto is a “propaganda pamphlet in which Marx and Engels presented some of their scientific ideas in collective form” (R. Aron: 116). Its central theme is class struggle to explain the above classical statement in some detail:

1. Human history is characterized by the struggle of human groups which will be called social classes.
2. The society is characterized by an antagonism between oppressors and oppressed and there is a tendency towards a polarization into two blocks.
3. Among the two polarized classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat) the bourgeoisie is incapable of maintaining its ascendancy without revolutionizing the instrument of production.
4. The basis of antagonism is the contradiction between the forces and the relationship of production.
5. By revolutionizing the instrument of production, the capitalist system is able to produce more and in spite of this increase in wealth poverty remains the lot of the majority.
6. This contradiction will eventually produce a revolutionary crisis.
7. The proletariat being the vast majority of the population will become a class i.e. a social entity aspiring to the seizure of power and the transformation of social relations.
8. The proletarian revolution will mark the end of classes and of the antagonistic character of capitalist society.
9. According to Marx (in the Communist Manifesto), in place of the old bourgeoisie society with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

With the above it has been corroborated by Raymond Aron (P118) that the aim of Marx's science is to provide a strict demonstration of the antagonistic character of capitalist society, the inevitable self-destruction of an antagonistic society and the revolutionary explosion that will put an end to the antagonistic character of modern society.

## CONFLICT THEORY

In developing this emancipatory project, Marx produced a formal theory of conflict and change, which he might disavow as a positivistic theory but which has been use nonetheless in developing counterparty conflict theory. In elaborating his model of revolutionary class conflict and social change, Marx delineated an image of social organization that still influences a major portion of contemporary sociological theory. Marx began with simple-and; Economic organization, especially the ownership of property, determines the organization of the rest of a society. The class structure and institutional arrangements, as well as cultural values, beliefs, religious dogmas, and other idea systems are ultimately a reflection of the economic base of a society. He then added to another assumption: Inherent in the economic organization of any society except communistic society-are forces inevitably generating revolutionary class conflict. Such revolutionary class conflict is seen as dialectical and conceptualized as occurring in epochs, with successive bases of economic organization sowing the seeds of their own destruction through the polarization of classes and subsequent overthrow of the dominant by the subjugated class. Hence, a third assumption: conflict is bipolar, with exploited classes under conditions created by the economy becoming aware of their true interests and eventually forming a revolutionary political organization that stands against the dominant, property- holding class.

The specifics of Marx's economic determinism, the theorists see a set of assumptions that directly challenge those imputed to functionalism and that can serve as an intellectual springboard for a conflict alternative in sociological theorizing.

1. While social relationships display systemic features, these relationships are rife with conflicting interests.
2. This fact reveals that social systems systematically generate conflict.
3. Conflict is therefore an inevitable and pervasive feature of social systems.
4. Such conflict tends to be manifested in the opposition of interests.

5. Conflict most frequently occurs over the distribution of scarce resources, most notably power and material wealth.
6. Conflict is the major source of change in social systems.

In addition to these assumptions, I think that the form and substance of Marx's analysis have been equally influential in the development of modern conflict theory. This analysis takes the general form of assuming that conflict is an inevitable and inexorable force in social systems and is activated under certain specified conditions. Some of these conditions are viewed as allowing for the transformation of latent class interests (lying in a state of "false consciousness") into manifest class interests ("class consciousness"), which, under additional conditions, lead to the polarization of society into classes joined in conflict. Thus, for Marx, there is a series of conditions that are cast into the role of intervening variables that accelerate or retard the inevitable transformation of class interest into revolutionary class conflict.

**Turner has summarized Marx's abstract propositions in the following manner.**

1. The more unequal is the distribution of scarce resources in a system, the greater is the conflict of interest between dominant and subordinate segments in a system.
2. The more subordinate segments become aware of their true collective interests, the more likely are they to question the legitimacy of the existing pattern of distribution of scarce resources.
  - a. The more social changes brought by dominant segments disrupt existing relations among subordinates; the more likely are the latter to become aware of their true interests.
  - b. The more practices of dominant segments create alienative dispositions among subordinates, the more likely they are to become aware of their true collective interests
  - c. The more members of subordinate segments can communicate their grievances to each other, the more likely they are to become aware of their true collective interests.
    - i. The more ecological concentration of members of subordinate groups, the more likely communication of grievances.

- ii. The more educational opportunities of subordinate group members, the more diverse the means of their communication, and the more likely they are to communicate their grievances.
- d. The more subordinate segments can develop unifying ideologies, the more likely they are to become aware of their true collective interests.
  - i. The greater the capacity to recruit or generate ideological spokespeople. The more likely ideological unification.
  - ii. The less the ability of dominant groups to regulate the socialization processes and communication networks in a system, the more likely ideological unification.
- 3. The more subordinate segments of a system are aware of their collective interests and the greater is their questioning of the legitimacy of the distribution of scarce resources, the more likely are they to join overt conflict against dominant segments of a system.
- 4. The less the ability of dominant groups to make manifest their collective interest, the more likely subordinate groups are to join in conflict.
- 5. The more the deprivations of subordinates move from an absolute to relative basis, the more likely they are to join in conflict.
- 6. The greater the ability of subordinate groups to develop a political leadership structure, the more likely they are to join in conflict.
- 7. The greater is the ideological unification of members of subordinate of a system and the more developed is their political leadership structure, the more likely are dominant and subjugated segments of a system to become polarized.
- 8. The more polarized are the dominant and subjugated, the more violent is their conflict.
- 9. The more violent is the conflict, the greater is the structural change of the system was no longer necessary and would wither away -predicted Marx.

- **COMMENT AND CRITICISM**

Although many of Marx's predictions have not come true, but his historical structural analysis of society has remained to be very useful for the social scientists today even the worst critics agree that Marxian theory provides an excellent framework for the analysis of conflict and change in growing and Marxist Sociology has already become an established branch of the discipline.

However, so far, the prediction of Marx for a classless society/ communism and withering away of the state is concerned, today's Marxists blame imperialism for the failure. They argue that advanced industrial nations have been able to fortify their capitalist economy by exploiting the rest of the world through neo-colonialist networks.

Contemporary Marxian Sociology has accumulated a considerable amount of evidence to substantiate the Marxian postulates that economic position is the major determinant of one's life style, attitudes, and behavior (Abraham and Morgan)

However, some of the criticisms of Marx need to be mentioned in relation to class and class conflict.

1. Marx has been criticized on his class division. Today capitalism has created conditions where the working class can no longer be regarded as totally alienated. Man's condition has improved due to the expansion of social services and security of employment.
2. The growth of new middle class contradicts the polarization model of Marx.

## **8.2 RALF DAHRENDORF ON CLASS AND CLASS CONFLICT IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**

In the late 1950's, Ralf Dahrendorf persistently argued that the Parsonian scheme and functionalism in general presents an overly consensual, integrated, and static vision of society. In Dahrendorf's view, society has two faces-one of consensus, the other of conflict. And it is time to begin analysis of society's ugly face and abandon the utopian image created by functionalism.

### **8.3 DAHRENDORF'S IMAGE OF THE SOCIAL ORDER**

For Dahrendorf, the process of institutionalization involves the creation of “imperatively coordinated associations” (hereafter referred to as ICAs) that represent a distinguishable organization of roles. This organization is characterized by power relationships, with some clusters of roles having power to extract conformity from others. Furthermore, although power denotes the coercion of some by others, these power relations in ICAs tend to become legitimated and can therefore be viewed as authority relations in which some positions have the “accepted” or “normative right” to dominate others. Dahrendorf thus conceives the social order as maintained by processes creating authority relations in the various types of ICAs existing throughout all layers of social systems.

At the same time, however, power and authority are the scarce resources over which subgroups within a designated ICA compete and fight. They are thus the major sources of conflict and change in these institutionalization patterns. This conflict is ultimately a reflection of where clusters of roles in an ICA stand in relation to authority, since the “objective interests” inherent in any role in a direct function of where that role possesses authority and power over other roles. However, even though roles in ICAs possess varying degrees of authority, any particular ICA can be typified in terms of just two basic types of roles, ruling and ruled. The ruling cluster of roles has an interest in preserving the status quo, and the ruled cluster has an interest in redistributing power, or authority. Under certain specified conditions, awareness of these contradictory interests increases, with the result that ICAs polarize into two conflict groups, each now aware of its objective interests, which then engage in a contest over authority. The resolution of this contest or conflict involves the redistribution of the authority in the ICA, thus making conflict the source of change in social systems. In turn, the redistribution of authority represents the institutionalization of a new cluster of ruling and ruled roles that, under certain conditions, polarize into two interest groups that initiate another contest for authority. Social reality is thus typified in terms of this unending cycle of conflict over authority within the various types of ICAs in a society overlap, leading to major conflicts cutting across large segments of the society, while, at other times and under different

conditions, these conflicts are confined to a particular ICA.

This image of social organization represents a revision of Marx's portrayal of social reality:

1. Social systems are seen by both Dahrendorf and Marx as in a continual state of conflict.
2. Such conflict is presumed by both authors to be generated by the opposed interests that inevitably inhere in the social structure of society.
3. Opposed interests are viewed by both Marx and Dahrendorf as reflections of differences in the distribution of power among dominant and subjugated groups.
4. Interests are seen by both as tending to polarize into two conflict groups.
5. For both, conflict is dialectical, with resolution of one conflict creating a new set of opposed interests that, under certain conditions, will generate further conflict.
6. Social changes are thus seen by both as ubiquitous feature of social systems and the result of inevitable conflict dialectics within various types of institutionalized patterns.

Much like, Marx, this image of institutionalization as a cyclical or dialectic process has led Dahrendorf into the analysis of only certain key causal relations:

- (1) conflict is assumed to be an inexorable process arising out of opposing forces within social-structural arrangements;
- (2) such conflict is accelerated or retarded by a series of intervening structural conditions or variables;
- (3) conflict resolution at one point in time creates a structural situation that, under specifiable conditions, inevitably leads to further conflict among opposed forces.

While borrowing much of Marx's about power and coercion in social systems. Dahrendorf actually ends up position a much different source of conflict: the institutionalized authority relations of ICAs, such a position is much different from that of Marx, who viewed such authority relations as simply a superstructure erected by the dominant classes, which, in the long run, would be destroyed by the conflict dynamics occurring below institutional arrangement. While Dahrendorf acknowledges that authority relations are imposed by the dominant groups in **ICAs (Imperative Coordinated Associations)** and frequently makes reference to "factual substrates," the source of conflict becomes, the legitimated authority role relations of ICAs. I think that this drift away from Marx's emphasis on the institutional substructure forces Dahrendorf to seek the source of conflict in those very relations that integrate, an ICA.

Although emphasizing different sources of conflict, Dahrendorf and Marx's models reveal similar causal chains of events leading to conflict and the reorganization of social structure. Relations of dominant and subjugation create an "objective" opposition of interests; awareness or consciousness by the subjugated of this inherent opposition of interests occurs under certain specifiable conditions; under other conditions, this newfound awareness leads to the political organization and then polarization of subjugated groups, who tend to join in conflict with the dominant group; the outcome of the conflict will usher in a new pattern of social organization; this new pattern of social organization will have within it relations of domination and subjugation that set off another sequence of events leading to conflict and then change in patterns of social organization.

The intervening conditions affecting these processes are outlined by both Marx's and Dahrendorf only with respect to formation of awareness of opposed interests by the subjugated, the politicization and polarization of the subjugated into a conflict group, and the outcome of the conflict. The intervening conditions under which institutionalized patterns generate dominant and subjugated groups and the conditions under which these can be typified as having opposed interests remain unspecified- apparently because they are in the nature of institutionalization, or ICAs and do not have to be explained.

## 8.4 PROBLEMS IN THE CAUSAL ANALYSIS

It is argued that in deviating from Marx's conception of the "substructure of opposed interest" existing below the cultural and institutional edifices of the ruling classes, Dahrendorf forfeits a genuine causal analysis of conflict and, therefore, an explanation of how patterns of social organization are changed. This criticism asks questions reminiscent of Dahrendorf's portrayal of Parsonian functionalism: How is it that conflict emerges from legitimated authority relations among roles in an ICA? How is it that the same structure that generates integration also generates conflict? Although for the Marxian scheme there are, analytical and empirical problems, the causal analysis is clear, since the source of conflict—the opposition of economic interests—is clearly distinguished from the institutional and cultural arrangements maintaining a temporary order—the social superstructure. Dahrendorf, however, has failed to make explicit this distinction and thus falls into the very analytical trap he has imputed to functional theory: change including conflict must mysteriously arise from the legitimated relations of the social system.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". Whose statement is this.**

- a) Max Weber
- b) Karl Marx
- c) Emile Durkheim
- d) Radcliffe Brown

**2. In Dahrendorf's view, society has two faces. These are:**

- a) Positive and Negative
- b) Consensus and Conflict

c) Functional and Non-functional

d) None of the above

**3. For Dahrendorf, the process of institutionalization involves the creation of:**

a) Imperatively Coordinated Associations

b) Ideologically Controlling Associations

c) Ideologically Coordinated Associations

d) None of the Above

### **8.5 LET US SUM UP**

Despite the vagueness of Dahrendorf's causal analysis, the great strength of his approach resides in the formulation of explicit propositions. These state the intervening empirical conditions that cause quasi groups to become conflict groups. More formally, Dahrendorf outlines three types of intervening empirical conditions:

(1) conditions of organization that affect the transformation of latent quasi groups into manifest conflict groups; (2) conditions of conflict that determine the form and intensity of conflict and (3) conditions of structural change that influence the kind, speed, and the depth of the changes in social structure.

Thus, the variables in the theoretical scheme are the (1) degree of conflict- group formation; (2) the degree of intensity of the conflict; (3) the degree of violence of the conflict; (4) the degree of change of social structure; and (5) the rate of such change.

## 8.6 GLOSSARY

### 1. ICAs- Imperatively Coordinated Associations

## 8.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss briefly the Conflict Theory given by Ralph Dahrendorf.

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2. Write in brief about various problems in Causal Analysis.

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## 8.8 LESSON END EXERCISE

### Multiple Choice Questions

**1. According to Ralf Dahrendorf, the primary source of social conflict in society is:**

- |                                    |                            |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) Economic relations              | b) Relations of authority  |
| c) Relations of property ownership | d) Innate human aggression |

**2. Dahrendorf's conflict theory arose primarily as a critique and alternative to which other major sociological perspective.**

- a) Symbolic Interactionism
- c) Structural Functionalism

- b) Feminist Theory
- d) Postmodernism

**3. Within any given organization or association, the unequal distribution of authority creates a division between which two groups.**

- a) The bourgeoisie and the proletariat
- c) The dominant and the subordinate
- b) The rich and the poor
- d) The integrated and the alienated

**4. Dahrendorf views social order as being maintained primarily through:**

- a) Shared values and norms (consensus)
- b) Mutual agreement among social classes
- c) Coercion by those at the top of the social hierarchy
- d) Religious beliefs and moral codes

**5. ----- is the term Dahrendorf used to describe people with similar latent power interests within an organization.**

**Answers: 1-b, 2-c, 3-c, 4-c, 5-Quasi-group**

## **8.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Ritzer, George (1988), *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
2. Ritzer, George (1997), *Post-Modern Social Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company
3. Turner, Jonathan H. (1987), *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

## **8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-B, 2- B, 3- A**

**FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT: LEWIS. A. COSER**

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**STRUCTURE**

**9.0 Learning Objectives**

**9.1 Introduction**

**9.2 J.H. Turner Propositions**

**9.3 Image of Social Organisation**

**9.4 Propositions on Conflict Processes**

**9.4.1 The Causes of Conflict: Coser's Proposition on the Causes of Conflict**

**9.4.2 The Violence of Conflict: Coser Proposition on Violence of Conflict**

**9.4.3 Duration of Conflict: Proposition on Duration of Conflict**

**9.4.4 Functions of Social Conflict: Coser's Proposition on Functions of Conflict for  
Respective Parties**

**9.5 Coser's Functional Approach: An Assessment.**

**9.6 Let us Sum up**

**9.7 Glossary**

**9.8 Self-Assessment Questions**

**9.9 Lesson End Exercise**

**9.10 Suggested Readings**

## **9.11 Answers to check your progress**

### **9.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through lesson, you will be able to:**

- **understand the Lewis Coser Functional Approach;**
- **examine the image of Social Organization; and**
- **know the various causes of conflict given by Coser.**

### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

The divergence in conflict theory is particularly evident when the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser is compared with Ralf Dahrendorf's dialectical conflict perspective. Although Coser consistently criticized Parsonian functionalism for its failure to address the issue of conflict, he has also been sharply critical of Dahrendorf and other dialectical theorists for underemphasizing the positive functions of conflict for maintaining social systems.

In his first major work on conflict, Coser launched what became the standard polemic against functionalism: conflict is not given sufficient attention, with related phenomena such as deviance and dissent too easily viewed as "pathological" for the equilibrium of the social system. Parsons, in his concern for developing a system of concepts denoting the process of institutionalization, underemphasized conflict in his formal analytical works, seemingly viewing conflict as a disease that needs to be treated by the mechanisms of the body social. I think that this rather one-sided portrayal of Parson's work allows Coser to posit the need for redressing the sins of Parsonian functionalism with a one-sided conflict scheme. Apparently, such analytical compensation was to be carried out for well over a decade, since after the 10th anniversary of his first polemic Coser was moved to reassert his earlier claim that it was "high time to tilt the scale in the direction of greater attention to social conflict." Yet, while Coser has consistently maintained that functional theorizing "has too often neglected the dimensions of power and interest," he does not follow either

Marx's or Dahrendorf's emphasis on the disruptive consequences of violent conflict. On the contrary, Coser seeks to correct Dahrendorf's analytical excesses by emphasizing the integrative and "adaptability" functions of conflict for social systems. Thus, Coser justifies his efforts by criticizing functionalism for ignoring conflict and conflict theory for underemphasizing the functions of conflict."

**9.2 J.H. TURNER THROUGH REWORKING, HAS GIVEN THE FOLLOWING PROPOSITIONS.**

1. The more members of quasi groups in ICAs can become aware of their objective interests and form a conflict group, the more likely is conflict to occur.
2. The more the "technical" conditions of organization can be met, the more likely is the formation of a conflict group.
3. The more a leadership cadre among quasi groups can be developed, the more likely are the technical conditions of organization to be met
4. The more a codified idea system, or charter, can be developed, the more likely are the technical conditions of organization to be met.
5. The more the "political" conditions of organization can be met, the more likely is the formation of a conflict group.
6. The more dominant groups permit organization of opposed interest, the more likely are the political conditions of organization to be met.
7. The more the "social" conditions of organization can be met, the more likely is the formation of a conflict group.
8. The more opportunity for members of quasi groups to communicate, the more likely are the social conditions of organization to be met
9. The more recruiting is permitted by structural arrangements (such as propinquity), the more likely are the social conditions to be met.
10. The less the technical, political, and social conditions of organization are met, the more intense is the conflict.

11. The more the distribution of authority and other rewards are associated with each other (superimposed), the more intense is the conflict.
12. The less the mobility between super- and subordinate groups, the more intense is the conflict.
13. The less the technical, political and social conditions or organization are met, the more violent is the conflict.
14. The more the deprivations of the subjugated in the distribution of rewards shifts from an absolute to relative basis, the more violent is the conflict.
15. The less the ability of conflict groups to develop regulatory agreements, the more violent is the conflict.
16. The more intense the conflict, the more structural change and reorganization it will generate.
17. The more violent the conflict, the greater is the rate of structural change and reorganization.

### **9.3 IMAGE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION**

Emile Durkheim is considered one of the fathers of functionalism but it is interesting to note that a “conflict functionalist” is critical of Durkheim’s approach. In particular, Coser views Durkheim as taking a conservative orientation to the study of society, an orientation that “prevented him for taking due cognizance of a variety of societal processes, among which social conflict is the most conspicuous.” Furthermore, this abiding conservatism forced Durkheim to view violence and dissent as deviant and pathological to the social equilibrium, rather than as opportunities for constructive social changes. Although Coser appears intent on rejecting the organism of Durkheim’s sociology, his work is also filled with organismic analogies, for example, in describing the “functions of violence,” Coser links violence to pain in the human body, since both can serve as a danger signal that allows the body social to readjust itself. To take another example, in his analysis of the “functions of dissent,” Coser rejects the notion that dissent is explainable in terms of individual sickness and embraces the assumption that “dissent may more readily be explained as a reaction to what is perceived as a sickness in the body social.” This form of analogizing reveals that he has not rejected organicism. Apparently, Coser has felt compelled to criticize Durkheim’s organicism

because it did not allow the analysis of conflict as a process that could promote the further adaptation and integration of the body social.

In rejecting the analytical constraints of Durkheim's analogizing, Coser embraces Georg Simmel's (see Chapter 6). Conflict is viewed as a process that, under certain conditions, functions to maintain the body social or some of its vital parts. From this vantage point, Coser develops an image of society that stresses:

1. The social world can be viewed as a system of variously interrelated parts.
2. All social systems reveal imbalances, tensions, and conflicts of interests among variously interrelated parts.
3. Processes within and between the system's constituent parts operate under different conditions to maintain, change, and increase or decrease a system's integration and adaptability.
4. Many processes, such as violence, dissent, deviance, and conflict, which are typically viewed as disruptive to the system, can also be viewed, under specifiable conditions, as strengthening the system's basis of integration as well as its adaptability to the environment.

From these assumptions, Coser articulates a rather extensive of propositions about the functions (and to a limited extent, the dysfunctions) of conflict for social systems. Coser offers some propositions about the conditions under which conflict leads to disruption and mal-integration of social system. The main thrust of his analysis is revolving around statements on how conflict maintains or reestablishes system integration and adaptability to changing conditions. Coser's analysis thus emphasizes;

(1) imbalances in the integration of system parts leads to (2) the outbreak of varying types of conflict among these parts, which in turn, causes (3) temporary reintegration of the system, which causes (4) increased flexibility in the system's structure, & (5) increased capability to resolve future imbalances through conflict, and (6) increased capability to adapt to changing conditions.

## **9.4 PREPOSITIONS ON CONFLICT PROCESSES**

Let us discuss some of his propositions:

1. In relation to the conflict process the cause of conflict (the cause of conflict; the violence of conflict;
2. the duration of conflict; and
3. the functions of conflict under each of these headings.

### **i) THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT**

Much like Weber, Coser emphasizes in proposition 1 that the withdrawal of legitimacy from an existing system of inequality is a critical precondition for conflict. In contrast, dialectical theorists such as Dahrendorf tend to view the causes of conflict as residing in “contradiction” or “conflict of interests.” As subordinates become aware of their interests, they pursue conflict; and hence, the major theoretical task is to specify the conditions raising levels of awareness. But Coser is arguing that conflicts of interests are likely to be exposed only after the deprived withdraw legitimacy from the system. Coser emphasizes that the social order is maintained by some degree of consensus over existing arrangements and that “disorder” through conflict occurs when conditions decreasing this consensus or legitimacy over existing arrangements are presents.

Proposition II indicates, however, that the withdrawal of legitimacy, in itself, is not likely to result in conflict. People must first become emotionally aroused, as opposed to some other emotional state, such as apathy and resignation. Here, Coser draws inspiration from Marx’s notion of relative deprivation. Marx observed and as a number of empirical studies have documented, that absolute deprivation does not always foster revolt. When people’s expectations for a better future suddenly begin to exceed perceived avenues for realizing these expectations, only they do they become sufficiently aroused to pursue conflict. The level of arousal will, in turn, be influenced by their commitments to the existing system, by the degree to which they have developed strong internal constrains, and on the nature and amount of social control in a system. Such propositions, for

example, lead to predictions that in systems with absolute dictators, who ruthlessly repress the masses, revolt by the masses is less likely than in systems where some freedoms have been granted and where the deprived have been led to believe that things will be getting better. Under these conditions, the withdrawal of legitimacy can be accompanied by released passions and emotions.

Coser's propositions on the causes of conflict

- I. The more subordinate members in a system of inequality question the legitimacy of the existing distribution of scarce resources, the more likely are they to initiate conflict.
  - A. The fewer are the channels for redressing grievances over the distribution of scarce resources by subordinates, the more likely are they to question legitimacy.
    - 1. The fewer are the internal organizations segmenting emotional energies of subordinates, the more likely are they to be without grievance alternative and, as a result, to question legitimacy.
    - 2. The greater are the ego deprivations of those without grievance channels, the more likely are they to question legitimacy.
  - B. The more membership in privileged groups is sought by subordinates and the less mobility allowed, the more likely are they to withdraw legitimacy.
- II. The more deprivations of subordinates are transformed from absolute to relative, the greater will be their sense of injustice, and hence, the more likely are they to initiate conflict.
  - A. The less is the degree to which socialization experiences of subordinates generate internal ego constraints, the more likely are they to experience relative deprivation.
  - B. The less are the external constraints applied to subordinates, the more likely are they to experience relative deprivation.

**ii) THE VIOLENCE OF CONFLICT**

Let us discuss Coser's most important propositions on the level of violence in conflict. Coser is somewhat vague in his definition of conflict violence, but he appears to be denoting the degree to which conflict parties seek to injure or eliminate each other. As most functional theorists are likely to emphasize, Coser's proposition I is directed at specifying the conditions under which conflict will be less violent.

#### Coser's Propositions on the Violence of Conflict:

- I.** The more group engage in conflict over realistic issues (obtainable goals), the more likely are they to seek compromises over the means to realize their interests, and hence, the less violent is the conflict.
- II.** The more groups engage in conflict over nonrealistic issues, the greater is the level of emotional arousal and involvement in the conflict, and hence, the more violent is the conflict.
  - A. The more conflict occurs over core values, the more likely is it to be over nonrealistic issues.
  - B. The more a realistic conflict endures, the more likely is it to become increasingly nonrealistic.
- III.** The less functionally interdependent and relations among social unit in a system, the less is the availability of institutional means for absorbing conflicts and tensions, and hence, the more violent is the conflict.
  - A. The greater are the power differentials between super-and subordinates in a system, the less functionally interdependent are relations.
  - B. The greater is the level of isolation of subpopulations in a system, the less functionally interdependent are relations.

The opposite fact; to specify the conditions under which conflict will be more violent.

Yet, the inverse of Coser's first proposition can indicate a condition under which conflict will be violent. The key concept in this proposition is "realistic issues." For Coser, realistic conflict involves the pursuit of specific aims against real sources of hostility, with some estimation of the costs to be incurred in such pursuit. Coser adds proposition II on conflict over "nonrealistic issues," such as ultimate values, beliefs, ideology, and vaguely defined class interests. When nonrealistic, then the conflict will be violent. Such no realism is particularly likely when conflict is over some values, which emotionally mobilize participants and make them unwilling to compromise. Moreover, if conflicts endure for a long period of time, then it becomes increasing by nonrealistic as parties become emotionally involved, and ideologies become codified, and as "the enemy" is portrayed in increasingly negative terms.

Proposition III adds a more structural variable to the analysis of conflict violence. In systems where there are high degrees of functional interdependence among actors-that is, where there are mutual exchanges and cooperation-then conflict is less likely to be violent. However, if there is great inequality in power among units or isolation of subpopulations, functional interdependence decreases, and hence when conflict occurs, it will tend to be nonrealistic violence.

### **iii) THE DURATION OF CONFLICT**

Coser's incorporation of the time variable is extremely limited. He views time in terms of the duration of conflict and as dependent variable, when it can also be an independent variable, he never specified on how the duration of conflict operates as an independent variable, influencing such variables as conflict intensity, violence, or functions. Thus, Coser's analysis is confined to the more limited, yet same important, questions: like what variables influence the length of conflict relations?

In propositions I and II, Coser underscores the fact that conflicts with a broad range of goals or with vague ones will be prolonged. When goals are limited and articulated, it is possible to know when they have been attained. With perception of attainment, the conflict can be terminated. Conversely, with a wide variety or long list of goals, a sense of attainment is less likely to

occur-thus prolonging the conflict. In proposition III, Coser emphasized that knowledge of what would symbolically constitute victory and defeat will influence the length of conflict. Without the ability to recognize defeat or victory, then conflict is likely to be prolonged to a point where one party destroys the other. Propositions IV and V deal with the role of leadership in conflict processes. The more leaders can perceive that complete attainment of goals is not possible and the greater is their ability convince followers to terminate conflict, the less prolonged is the conflict.

Coser's overall image of conflict duration is as follows. Where goals of conflict parties are extensive, where there is dissent over goals, where conflict parties cannot interpret symbolic points of victory and defeat, where leaders cannot assess the costs of victory, and where leaders cannot effectively persuade followers, then the conflict will be of longer duration than when the converse conditions hold true.

### **Propositions on the Duration of Conflict**

- I.** The less limited are the goals of the opposing parties to a conflict, the more prolonged is the conflict.
- II.** The less is the degree of consensus over the goals of conflict, the more prolonged is the conflict.
- III.** The less the parties in a conflict can interpret their adversary's symbolic points of victory and defeat, the more prolonged is the conflict.
- IV.** The more leaders of conflicting parties can perceive that complete attainment of goals is possible at only very high costs, the less prolonged is the conflict.
  - A.** The more equal is the power between conflicting groups, the more likely are leaders to perceive the high costs of complete attainment of goals.
  - B.** The more clear-cut are the indexes of defeat or victory in a conflict, the more likely are leaders to perceive the high costs of complete attainment of goals.
- V.** The greater is the capacity of leaders of each conflict party to persuade followers to terminate

conflict, the less prolonged is the conflict.

- A. The more centralized are the conflict parties; the greater is a leader's capacity to persuade followers.
- B. The fewer are internal cleavages within conflict parties, the greater is a leader's capacity to persuade followers.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. Who gave the Positive functions of conflict for maintaining the social system.**

- a) Randall Collins
- b) Dahrendorf
- c) Emile Durkheim
- d) Coser

**2. What are the four Propositions on Conflict processes as given by Coser.**

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**3. The more differentiated and functionally interdependent are the unit in a system, the more likely is the conflict to be frequent but of low degrees of intensity and violence (True or False).**

**iv) THE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT**

If some process or structure has functions for some other feature of a system, there is often an implicit assumption about what is good and bad for a system. If this implicit evaluation is not operative, how does one assess when an item is functional or dysfunctional? Even seemingly neutral

concepts, such as survival or adaptability, merely mask the implicit evaluation that is taking place. Sociologists are usually not in a position to determine what is survival and adaptation. To say that an item has more a survival value or increases adaptation is frequently a way to mask an evaluation of what is “good.”

In Coser’s propositions on the functions of conflict, he possibly states that conflict is good when it promotes integration based on solidarity, clear authority, functional interdependence, and normative control. In Coser’s terms, it is more adaptive. Other conflict theorists might argue that conflict in such a system is bad because integration and adaptability in this specific context could be exploitive.

Coser divides his analysis of the functions of conflict along lines similar to those by Simmel: the functions of conflict for (1) the respective parties to the conflict and (2) the systemic whole in which the conflict occurs.

Coser’s Propositions on the functions of conflict for the Respective parties:

- I. The more violent or intense is the conflict, the more clear-cut are the boundaries of each respective conflict party.
- II. The more violent or intense is the conflict and the more internally differentiated are the conflict parties, the more likely is each conflict party to centralize its decision-making structure.
- III. The more violent or intense is the conflict and more it is perceived to affects the welfare or all segments of the conflict parties, the more conflict promotes structural and ideological solidarity among members of each conflict party.
- IV. The more violent or intense is the conflict, the more conflict leads to the suppression of dissent and deviance within each conflict parity as well as forced conformity to norms and values.
- V. The more conflict between parties leads to forced conformity, the greater is the accumulation of hostilities, and the more likely is internal group conflict to surface in the long run.

## Coser Propositions on the Functions of conflict for the social whole

- I. The more differentiated and functionally interdependent are the unit in a system, the more likely is conflict to be frequent but of low degrees of intensity and violence.
- II. The more frequent are conflict, the less is their intensity, and the lower is their level of violence, then the more likely are conflict in a system to
  - (a) increase the level of innovation and creativity of system, units, (b) release hostilities before they polarize system units, (c) promote normative regulation of conflict relations, (d) increase awareness of realistic issues, and (e) increase the number of associative coalitions among social units.
- III. The more conflict promotes (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) above, then the 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.

## 9.5 COSER'S FUNCTIONAL APPROACH: AN ASSESSMENT

Coser's approach has done much to correct for the one-sidedness of Dahrendorf's analysis, while it has reintroduced Simmel's ideas into conflict theory. Yet, Coser's scheme represents an analytical one-sidedness that, if followed exclusively, would produce a skewed vision of the social world. Coser begins with statements about the inevitability of force, coercion, constraint, and conflict, but his analysis quickly turns to the integrative and adaptive consequences of such processes. This emphasis could rather easily transform the integrative and adaptive consequences of such processes. This emphasis could rather easily transform the integrative and adaptive functions of conflict into functional needs and requisites that necessitate, or even cause, conflict to occur. Such teleology was inherent in Marx's work, where revolutionary conflict was viewed as necessary to meet the need for a communist society. But Coser's teleological inspiration appears to have come more from Simmel's organic model than Marx's dialectical scheme. Once he documents how conflict contributes to the systemic whole, or body social, Coser inadvertently implies that the body social causes conflict in order to meet its integrative needs. Although conflict is acknowledged

by Coser to cause change in social systems, it is still viewed primarily as a crucial process in promoting integration and adaptation.

Coser, like so many conflict theorists, creates a problem when he tries to correct for past weaknesses in other approaches and in trying to compensate for the one-sidedness of dialectical theory and functionalism, Coser presents yet one more skewed approach.

Thus, the major substantive problem in Coser's scheme is its functionalism. To correct this problem, there is a little need to redirect his propositions on the causes, violence, and duration of conflict. These propositions address, to important questions neutrally and do not attempt to balance or correct for past theoretical one-sidedness with another kind of one-sidedness. Indeed, they display an awareness of key aspects of conflict in social systems; and with supplementation and reformulation, they offer an important theoretical lead. The substantive one-sidedness in the scheme comes with Coser's borrowing and then supplanting Simmel's functional propositions. One corrective strategy, which does not smack of another form of one-sidedness, is to ask the more neutral theoretical question: under what conditions can what kinds of outcomes of conflict for what types of systems and subsystems be expected? Although this is not a startling theoretical revelation, but it keeps assessments of conflict processes away from what ultimately must be evaluative questions of functions and dysfunctions. If the question of outcomes of conflicts is more rigorously pursued, the resulting propositions will present a more balanced and substantively accurate view of social reality. Because of the long and unfortunate organic connotations of words such as "function,"

In sum, then, it makes little sense to have new perspectives that correct for the deficiencies of either dialectical or functional conflict theory. Sociological theory has far too long engaged in this kind of activity; and it is far more appropriate, to visualize conflict as one of many important processes in the social universe and to develop some abstract principles about this process that avoid problems inherent in all forms of functional analysis.

## 9.6 LET US SUM UP

Lewis Coser's theory of conflict argues that conflict is a natural and common feature of social life that serves crucial positive functions for society. Rather than being purely destructive, conflict can strengthen internal group cohesion, facilitate necessary social change and adaptation, and provide an outlet for pent-up social tensions. Coser also distinguished between realistic conflicts, arising from specific, solvable issues over scarce resources, and non-realistic conflicts, which are more ideological and express underlying hostility, with realistic conflicts being more amenable to resolution and less likely to endure.

## 9.7 GLOSSARY

1. Coser's central idea is that conflict is not always negative, it can have functional benefits for a social system.
2. Conflict with an external group can increase solidarity and integration with the group itself.

## 9.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Explain in brief Coser functional Analysis of Conflict.

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2. Write in detail about the image of Social Organisation given by Coser.

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## **9.9 LESSON END EXERCISE**

### **Multiple Choice Questions**

**1. According to Lewis Coser, conflict can serve which of the following functions within a social group.**

- a) It always leads to the complete dissolution of the group.
- b) It strengthens group solidarity and cohesion, particularly against an external threat.
- c) It exclusively benefits the dominant class, as argued by Karl Marx.
- d) It is an irrational and purely destructive force

**2. Coser introduced the concept of "functional conflict," which refers to conflicts that**

- a) are destructive and lead to societal collapse.
- b) are non-destructive and contribute positively to the stability of a social group.
- c) arise purely from economic disparities.
- d) are a result of authority and power, regardless of their outcome.

**3. According to Coser, conflict can provide an outlet for pent-up tensions and grievances, thereby preventing them from causing more significant problems. This idea relates to the concept of**

- a) Class antagonism
- b) Structural rigidity
- c) Safety-valve function
- d) Resource scarcity

**4. The term conflict is best defined as**

- a) a disagreement or clash between ideas, principles, or people
- b) a state of complete harmony
- c) The process of effective communication
- d) A situation where everyone agrees

5. The two types of conflict discussed by Lewis Coser are ----- and -----

Answers: 1-b, 2-b, 3-c, 4-a, 5-realistic and non-realistic.

#### 9.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Ritzer, George (1988), *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
2. Ritzer, George (1997), *Post-Modern Social Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company
3. Turner, Jonathan H. (1987), *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

#### 9.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers: 1- d, 3- true

**CONFLICT AND SOCIAL CHANGE: R. COLLINS**

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**STRUCTURE**

**10.0 Learning Objectives**

**10.1 Introduction**

**10.2 Talk and Ritual**

**10.3 Deference and Demeanor**

**10.4 Key Proposition on Deference and Demeanor**

**10.5 Class Cultures**

**10.6 Key Propositions on Class Cultures**

**10.7 Let us sum up**

**10.8 Glossary**

**10.9 Self-Assessment Questions**

**10.10 Lesson End Exercise**

**10.11 Suggested Readings**

**10.12 Answers to check your progress**

**10.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able:

- **to understand the concept of deference and demeanor;**
- **to know the concept of Talk and Ritual; and**
- **to understand the key prepositions on class culture.**

## **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

Collins's general argument about the interactive foundations of social structure and the effects of the macro dimensions of space, time, and size on interaction were anticipated in earlier works. In *Conflict Sociology*, Collins proposed the following steps for building social theory. First, examine typical real-life situations where people encounter each other. Second, focus on the material arrangements that affect interaction – the physical layout of situations, the means and modes of communication, the available tools, weapons, and goods. Third, assess the relative resources that people bring to, use in, or extract from encounters. Fourth, entertain the general hypotheses that those with resources press their advantage that those without resources seek the best deal they can get under the circumstances, and that stability and change are to be explained in terms of the lineup and shifts in the distribution of resources. Fifth, assume that cultural symbols – ideas, beliefs, norms, values, and the like – are used to represent the interests of those parties who have the resources to make their views prevail. Sixth, look for the general and generic features of particular cases so that more abstract propositions can be extracted from the empirical particulars of a situation.

Thus, as with his recent work on interaction rituals, there is a concern with the encounter, with the distribution of individuals in physical space, with their respective capital or resources to use in exchanges, and with inequalities in resources. As with his recent work, the respective resources of individuals are critical: “power” is the capacity to coerce or to have others do so on one’s behalf; “material resources” are wealth and the control of money as well as property or the capacity to control the physical setting and people’s place in it; and “symbolic resources” are the respective levels of linguistic and conversational resources as well as the capacity to use cultural ideas, such as ideologies, values, and beliefs, for one’s purposes.

A central consideration in all of Collins's propositions is "social density," or the number of people co-present in a situation where an encounter takes place. Social density is, of course, part of the macrostructure since it is typically the result of past chains to interaction. But it can also be a "material resource" that some individuals can use to their advantage. Thus, the interaction in an encounter will be most affected by the participants' relative resources and the density or number of individuals co-present. These variables influence the two underlying micro dynamics in Collins's scheme, talk, and ritual.

## **10.2 TALK AND RITUAL**

For Collins, talk is the emission of verbal and nonverbal gestures that carry meaning and that are used to communicate with others and to sustain (or create) a common sense of reality. Collins classifies conversations among people in terms of the types of talk employed, including "practical conversations" (used to accomplish ends or goals), "ideological conversations" (used to arouse emotions to legitimate certain actions and situations), "intellectual conversation" (discussions of ideas and issues), "entertainment talk" (conversation for its own enjoyment), "gossip" (discussions and evaluations of acquaintances), and "personal talk" (discussion of oneself). Since talk is one of the key symbolic resources of individual in encounters, much of what transpires among interacting individuals is talk and the use of this cultural capital to develop their respective lines of conduct. More important sociologically are conversations that are part of a "chain" of previous encounters, if people felt good about a past conversation, they will usually make efforts to have another; and if they perceive each other's resources, especially symbolic or cultural but also material ones, as desirable, then they will seek to talk again. And if they have developed ritualized interaction that affirms their common group membership, they will be likely to enact those rituals again. Conversations among equals who share common levels of resources will be more personal, flexible, and long-term because people feel comfortable with such conversations. As a result, the encounter raises their level of emotional energy and increases their cultural capital. That is, they are anxious to talk again and to pick up where they felt off. However, the nature of talk in an encounter changes dramatically then there is inequality in the resources of the participants. Further subordinates will try to avoid wasting or losing emotional energy and spending

their cultural capital by keeping the interaction brief, formal, and highly ritualized with trite and inexpensive words. Yet, Collins further argues, even under conditions of inequality and even more when equality exists, people who interact and talk in repeated encounters will tend, over time, to develop positive sentiments and will have positive emotional feelings. Moreover, they will also converge in their definitions of situations and develop common moods, outlooks, beliefs, and ideas. And finally, they will be likely to develop strong attachments and a sense of group solidarity, which is sustained through rituals.

### **10.3 DEFERENCE AND Demeanor**

In equality and stratification are structures only in the sense of being temporal chains of interaction rituals among varying numbers of people with different levels of resources. Thus, to understand these structures, it is necessary to examine what people actually do across time and in space. One thing that they do in interaction to exhibit deference and demeanor. Collins define deference as the process of manipulating gestures to show respect to others; or if one is in a position to command respect, the process of manipulation of gestures is to elicit respect from others. The actual manipulation of gestures is termed demeanor. Deference and demeanor are, therefore, intimately connected to each other. They are also tied to talk and rituals, since talk involves the use of gestures and since deference and demeanor tend to become ritualized. Hence, deference and demeanor can be visualized as one form of talk and ritual activity—a form that is most evident in those interactions that create and sustain inequalities among people.

Collins visualizes several variables as central to understanding deference and demeanor:

1. Inequality in resources, particularly wealth and power.
2. Social density variables revolving around the degree to which behaviours are under the “surveillance of others” in a situation.
3. Social density variables revolving around the degree to which communications network are “cosmopolitan” (i.e. unrestricted to others who are co-present in a situation).

### **10.4 KEY PROPOSITION ON DEFERENCE AND Demeanor**

- I. The visibility, explicitness, and predictability of deference and demeanor rituals and talk among individuals is a positive and additive function of:
  - A. A degree of inequality in resources among individuals, especially with respect to:
    - 1. Material wealth
    - 2. power
  - B. The degree of surveillance by others of behaviours emitted by individuals, with surveillance being a positive function of:
    - 1. The extent to which others are co-present.
    - 2. The degree of homogeneity in outlook of others.
  - C. The restrictiveness of communication networks (low cosmopolitanism), with restrictiveness being a negative function of:
    - 1. The degree of complexity in communications technologies.
    - 2. The degree of mobility of individuals.
- II. The greater is the degree of inequality among individuals and the lower is the level of surveillance, the more likely are behaviours to be directed toward:
  - A. Avoidance of contact and emission of deference and demeanor by individuals.
  - B. Perfunctory performance of deference and demeanor by individuals when avoidance is not possible.
- III. The greater is the degree of inequality among individuals and the lower is the level of cosmopolitanism among individuals; the more likely are behaviours to be directed toward simplified but highly visible deference and demeanor.
- IV. The greater is the degree of inequality among individuals, and the less is the degree of mobility among groups with varying levels of resources, the more visible, explicit, and predictable are deference and demeanor rituals and talk within these groups.
- V. The greater is the equality among individuals, and the greater is the degree of cosmopolitanism and/or the less is the level of surveillance, the less compelling are deference and demeanor talk and rituals.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. For Collins, ----- is the emission of verbal and non-verbal gestures that carry meaning and that are used to communicate with others and to sustain a common sense of reality.**

- a) reading
- b) writing
- c) Talk
- d) none of the above

**2. ----- and ----- can be visualized as one form of talk and visual activity- a form that is most evident in interactions that create and sustain inequalities among people.**

- a) Talk and Ritual
- b) consensus and conflict
- c) Deference and demeanor
- d) reading and writing

**3. What is the meaning of Deference, according to Collins. Explain in two lines.**

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## 10.5 CLASS CULTURES

These micro processes of talk, ritual, deference, and demeanor explain what are often seen as more macro processes in societies. One such process is variation in the class cultures. That is, people in different social classes tend to exhibit diverging behaviours, outlooks, and interpersonal styles. These differences are accountable in terms of two main variables:

1. The degree to which one possesses and uses the capacity to coerce, to materially bestow, and to symbolically manipulate others so that one can give orders in an encounter and have these orders followed.
2. The degree to which communication is confined to others who are physically co-present in a situation, or conversely, the degree to which communication is diverse, involving the use of multiple modes of conflict with many others in different situations.

Utilizing these two general classes of variables, which are part of the macrostructure that has been up in past chains of interaction as well as several less central ones such as wealth and physical exertion on the job, Collins describes the class cultures of American society. More significantly for theory building, he also offers several abstract propositions that stipulate certain important relationships among power, order giving, communication networks, and behaviour tendencies among individuals. He has restated these relationships in somewhat altered form in with these principles, Collins explains variations in the behaviours, outlooks and interpersonal styles of individuals in different occupations and status groups. For example, those occupations that require order-giving, that reveal high co-presence of other, and that involve little physical exertion will generate behaviour that are distinctive and that circumscribe other activities, such as whom one marries, where one lives, what one values, and what activities one pursues in various spheres of life. Different weights to these variables would cause varying behavioral tendencies in individuals. Thus, it is from the processes delineated in the propositions of Table 21-4 that understanding of such variables as class culture, ethnic cultures, lifestyles and other concerns of investigators of stratification is to be achieved. But such understanding is anchored in the recognition that these class cultures are built up and sustained by interaction chains where deference and demeanor rituals

have figured prominently. Thus, a class culture is not mere internalization of values and beliefs as well as simple socialization (although this is no doubt involved), but rather, it is the result of repeated encounters among unequals under varying conditions imposed by the macrostructure as it has been built up from past chains of interaction.

## **10.6 KEY PROPOSITIONS ON CLASS CULTURES**

Giving order to others in a situation is a positive and additive function of the capacity to mobilize and use coercive, material, and symbolic resources.

The behavioral attributes of self-assuredness, the initiation of talk, positive self-feelings, and identification with the goals of a situation are a positive function of the capacity to give orders to others in that situation.

The behavioral attributes of toughness, courage, and action in a situation are a positive function of the degree of physical exertion and danger in that situation.

The degree of behavioral conformity exhibited in a situation is a positive function of the degree to which people can communicate only with others who are physically co-present in that situation and is a negative function of the degree to which people can communicate with a diversity of others who not physically co-present.

The outlook and behavioral tendencies of an individual are an additive function of those spheres of the life-work, politics, home, recreation, community-where varying degrees of giving-receiving orders, physical exertion, danger, and communication occur.

## **10.7 LET US SUM UP**

Randall Collin's central theory is a "radical microsociology" focusing on interaction ritual chain, arguing that successful rituals create symbols of group membership, generate emotional energy, and influence cultural capital, thereby explaining social phenomenon like stratification and conflict. He stated that individuals having cultural capital, seek out interactions offering the best energy pay off, leading to pattern of social organization and

stratification that are built from these micro-level interactions. Collins offers a conflict perspective that integrates macro-level structures with micro-level face-to-face encounters to explain how power and stratification are created and maintained.

## 10.8 GLOSSARY

1. **IRT-** Interaction Ritual Theory
2. **Demeanor-** refers to the outward behavior and conduct of an individual, encompassing their attitude, mannerisms, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and overall presence in social interaction.
3. **Deference-** refers to the granting of influence, esteem or respect from one person to another, based on their status or perceived superiority.

## 10.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write in brief about the Conflict Approach given by Randal Collins.

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2. Write in brief about the key propositions on deference and Demeanor.

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## 10.10 LESSON END EXERCISE

1. **Randal Collins see Organizations as-----**
2. **What are Randall Collins' primary contribution to conflict theory.**
  - a) He provided a purely Marxist explanation of class conflict.
  - b) He focused on macro-level structures and ignored everyday interactions.
  - c) He incorporated micro-sociology and the role of interaction rituals into conflict analysis.
  - d) He argued that conflicts are solely the result of economic inequalities
3. **In his book “The Credential Society”, what did Collins argue regarding educational attainment.**
  - a) educational attainment is based purely on merit and skill acquisition.
  - b) public schools are neutral institutions that serve all classes equally.
  - c) educational expansion is driven by the need for more specialized jobs.
  - d) Credentialism helps explain class-based differences in educational attainment and social closure in the job market.
4. **According Collins, where can social structures can empirically translate**
  - a) Solely in economic production methods
  - b) in political power dynamics at the state level
  - c) in universal shared values and consensus
  - d) in patterns of repetitive micro-interaction
5. **How does Collins' view of conflict differ from that of Karl Marx.**
  - a) Collins believes conflict is a positive force for social change, while Marx saw it as destructive.
  - b) Collins views conflict as primarily an ideological struggle, not a material one.

c) Collins provides a multi-causal explanation for the world, criticizing Marx's "mono-causal" focus on economics

d) Collins argues that conflict is a temporary phase that will eventually be resolved.

**Answers: 1- arenas of struggle, 2-c, 3-d, 4-d, 5-c**

### **10.11 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Ritzer, George (1988), *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
2. Ritzer, George (1997), *Post-Modern Social Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company
3. Turner, Jonathan H. (1987), *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

### **10.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-c, 2-c**

**STRUCTURE**

**11.0 Learning Objectives**

**11.1 Introduction**

**11.2 William James (1842-1910)**

**11.3 Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929)**

**11.4 John Dewey (1859-1952)**

**11.5 W. I. Thomas (1863-1947)**

**11.6 George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)**

**11.7 Varieties of Symbolic Interactionism**

**11.8 The Chicago and Iowa School**

**11.9 The Dramaturgical Approach**

**11.10 Ethnomethodology:**

**11.11 Criticisms of Symbolic Interactionism**

**11.12 Let us sum up**

**11.13 Glossary**

#### **11.14 Self-Assessment Questions**

#### **11.15 Lesson End Exercise**

#### **11.16 Suggested Readings**

#### **11.17 Answers to check your progress**

### **11.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- **understand the concept of symbolic Interactionism;**
- **know the varieties of symbolic interactionism;**
- **understand the Chicago and Iowa School; and**
- **understand the dramaturgical approach given by Erving Goffman.**

### **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is difficult to define what constitutes symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective in sociology. Mead's ideas have been expounded by several sociologists throughout the years and writings of his best-known student, H. Blumer. As interpreted by Blumer (1969:2-6) interactionism consists of three premises: First, human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Secondly, these meanings are a product of social interaction in human society. Thirdly, these meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process. The historical underpinnings of these premises are found not only in the works of Mead, but also in C.H. Cooley's theory of Society, J. Dewey's formulations of the concept of *habit*, and W.I. Thomas's notion of the definition of the situation. In addition to Thomas and Cooley, the symbolic tradition has also been developed by Robert MacIver.

Thus, symbolic interaction is the interaction that takes place among the various minds, and the meanings that characterizes human societies. Society is to be understood in terms of individuals making it up, and individuals are to be understood in terms of the societies of which they are members. In the interactionist image, human beings are defined as self-reflective beings.

Human beings are organisms with selves, and behaviour in society is often directed by the self. An individual is influenced by the social environment, which is experienced in the form of social meanings, and meanings are learned by individuals in social interaction. We shall now proceed with a more detailed discussion of the works of the early interactionists and the role that they played in the development of interactionism to its present form. They are mainly:

- **William James**
- **C.H Cooley**
- **John Dewey**
- **W.I. Thomas**
- **G.H. Mead**

## **11.2 WILLIAM JAMES (1842-1910)**

James used three concepts especially in the development of symbolic interactionism. These were ‘habit’ (later to be popularized through the writings of J. Dewey) ‘instinct’ and ‘self’.

According to James, any analysis of the concept of instinct must account for its relationship with ‘habits’. *An instinct, James wrote, is usually defined as the faculty of acting in such a way as to produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance.* In turns, *habits arise from past experiences* and serve to influence the direction of original instincts in a way that James formulates under a ‘law of annihilation by habit’.

As set forth in 1890, James’ conceptualization of a social self in humans revealed a great deal of sophistication in understanding the relationships between the individuals and social groups as being of an interactive nature. For James, the general concept of self-referred to ‘the sum total’ of all that the individual can call this (James:1890:292). James defined the four separate selves of humans, a material self, a social self, a spiritual self, and pure ego. James defined the social self in following manner: Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind.

There is another aspect of James' work that is equally important for understanding the congruity between pragmatism. James referred to the pragmatist's definition of human beings as creative, active beings, who could play a conscious role in the control of their own destinies. James developed his philosophy of pragmatism: a philosophy where the potentialities of the individual living within the environment were to be realized by applying which existed between the individual and his environment. This potential could be actualized only in interaction with others in the social order. Thus, James manifested in the psychology that pragmatism provided the basis for an image of human that was congruent with the developing interactionist perspective.

### **11.3 CHARLES HORTON COOLEY (1864-1929)**

Cooley had hoped to develop a new theory of human society with a new methodology for understanding of human behaviour, which he explained with two unique properties, namely, organic nature on the one hand and mental nature on the other.

As social organization, society was seen as existing in the minds of the particular individuals constituting the social unit and this makes society 'real' to its members. In actuality, there is no 'mind of society' but many different minds that exist through a sharing of expectations and patterns of behaviour. Therefore, in this discussion on the conceptualization of the social organization of society, Cooley provided the role of interaction is that of a mediating bond between social environments and individuals. The concept of 'the primary group' can serve as a convenient organizational element along with the concept of 'human nature' and 'the looking glass self'; from a triadic relationship that underlies Cooley's work on the nature of the relationships between the individual and society.

In his earlier works, e.g. *Human Nature and the Social order*, Cooley spoke of human nature as existing on three different levels, namely, hereditary, symbolic interactionism and social in nature. This is the human nature that develops within primary groups, and it is here that a link between the three concepts of primary group, human nature and looking-glass self. It is here that human nature can be seen in its principal aspect, that of plasticity, or what Cooley calls teach ability.

In discussing the development of the self in the child, J.M.Baldwin emphasized the relationship

between the objective (social) and subjective (individual\_ the interaction between society and mind- and further he formulated three major processes of self-development in the child: the projective, subjective, and ejective stages. The projective stage referred to the level at which consciousness of others develops (to recognize others). The subjective stage characterized the level at which self-consciousness develops (a career of imitation). The ejective process refers to the child 'ejecting' of his/her own feelings and subjective interpretations into others (elementary form of empathy).

Finally, the self becomes lodged in one's life experiences through the development of an individual identity. The identity is obtained when the child becomes aware of the fact that the picture of who he/she is reflects the imaginations of others concerning him/her. Thus, the self exists in the minds of the members of society and for Cooley, constitutes an 'imaginative fact' (Cooley: 1902). Here there is a chance of dialectic of personal growth between self and identity when one does not acquire a imaginative fact. An individual can exploit its full potential for creation in the milieu of freedom between individual and society. Thus, a vital changing society depends upon the full usage of this potential human nature with reference to the dialectic of personal growth- a process that is defined in terms of change and conflict.

#### **11.4 JOHN DEWEY (1859-1952)**

Dewey set out to 'reconstruct' philosophy with the interaction of proposing solutions to problems of everyday life. Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future, which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization, in our solutions. Dewey noted that the resultant position was one which defined human, their environment, and their thought as interrelated aspects of a larger life.

The concept most basic to Dewey's thought on the relationship between the individual and the social group is *habit*. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey (1922), stated, Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than the bare recurrence of specific facts. The conditions which constitute habit, however, lie not in the individual, but in the social order. "Habits" could be changed by a concerted effort in the direction of changing the individual, with little reference to the conditions

that were present in social life and social order.

Dewey's approach to the study of individual and social behaviour imposed upon humans a perspective, which defined them as social beings. Whatsoever, an individual has to perform externally in behaviour, are conceived to exist internally in the mind (Dewey: 1922). Activity is to be seen in terms of the integrated nature of mind, body, and environment.

The social development of the mind could take place only through communication especially through language. Dewey's advances in the study of social problems are best seen in the application of the concept of habit to the theory of social behaviour. Thus, while social reform is important for the development of a society based upon pragmatic principles, Dewey clearly reveals his relationship to Cooley: Society is many associations, not a single organization. Society means associations; coming together in joint intercourse and action for better realization of any form of experience which is augmented and confirmed by being shared

### **11.5 W.I. THOMAS (1863-1947)**

The works of W.I. Thomas represent, better than the works of any other early interactionists, the attempt to find, a theory of motivation and to the definition of the situation that mediated between the individual and social sources of behaviour. Thomas later works especially, are characterized by an over-riding interest in the interrelationships between the personality, the situation, and sympathetic introspection. Thomas left his own mark on the theory of personality. Thomas formulated the concept of *wishes*. The wishes have been defined as forces which impel towards action, but not as the causes of behaviour. This concept of the wish parallels closely the idea of what Mead labeled an 'inner condition a want'. The wish also parallels J. Dewey's concept of habit, i.e. it takes into account both the individual and social factor in behaviour.

Thus, as with the concept of habit, the conditions of the phenomena are given in the social order, and, in combination with the individual, as defined in the pragmatic perspective, act to produce an adjustment to the situation. For, the concept or the definition of the situation implies

as with Mead's philosophy of the present; that the past and the future are often obtained with respect to an emergent present.

We shall now turn our attention to the best-known figure in the development of symbolic interactionism- G.H. Mead.

### **11.6 George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)**

Ironically, G.H. Mead, a close friend of Dewey, published no books during his life time, but has become one of the best known 'sociologists'. We shall treat Mead's theory of the self from *Mind, self and Society* (1934), as the focal point at which he synthesizes his work in philosophical and psychological tradition. Thus, as suggested elsewhere (Petras:1973), the underlying basis of Mead's theories regarding genesis of the self and the role of society and the mind in human behaviour, evolves out of his working within a phylogenetic framework. Mead constructed a functional theory of mind that is similar in all important respect to the approach of Dewey. The mind is an instrument which finds its reality in behavioural manifestations. The mind exists not in structure but in conduct. The mind is a tool which seeks adjustive relationship between the individual and his/her environment. The origin of the human mind is explained with reference to the interaction process and communication that are present-while the mind emerges out of social interaction. Thus, Mead does not speak of individual minds, but of mind development in human species. Theories of motivation were also its height at the time of Mead's influence at Chicago. Mead elaborated upon the conception of consciousness. The concept of motivation and consciousness advances the idea of perceptions which paralleled overtly with the 'act'-the fundamental unit of social behaviour. The initiation of the social act commences with the gesture which outlines the behaviour that is to follow. Mead had been greatly influenced by those of W.Wundt's theories which focus on the concept of the *gesture*, but he took issue with Wundt's theory of the *origin of society*, which was based upon the presupposition of the existence of individual minds. The teleological or functional nature of the act implies its division into various stages, logically and temporally related. The basis of the relationship between the individual and society rests in the idea of mutual dependence that is

implicit in the social act.

As did Dewey, Mead dissociated himself from the earlier sociological views of language. L. Ward the father of American Sociology, for example had believed that language is human was the natural result of being born human. Mead on the other hand wrote that language is anything but an individual experience. Vocal gestures and the behaviour that is linked to them in human societies provide the basis of symbolic interaction vocal gesture in the form for symbolic interaction. Vocal gestures in the form of symbols are nothing but a stimulus whose response is given in advance. Mead was rather optimistic regarding the potentialities of society having pragmatist ideas for the future development of American society. In conclusion, Mead's theory of human behaviour offers more than a theory of self-development. The self is comprised of two components processes, the I and the Me, which represent internalized dual system of non-determinacy and determinacy. The presence in two systems made men and women both determined and determiners. Mead developed a theory which he considered to be congruent with universal phylogenetic processes and the obvious facts of social life.

### **11.7 Varieties of Symbolic Interactionism**

Contemporary symbolic interactionism comprehends several diverse schools of thought. Meltzer and Petras, for example two major varieties, the Chicago school and Iowa schools, on the basis of differences in methodology. Reynolds and Meltzer distinguish three methodologically three distinct groups of interactionists: an 'unorthodox' group (favouring participant observation), a 'semi- conventional' group (favouring positivism), and a 'conventional' group (favouring a combination of methods). Broadly, these are identified by 'conventional' and 'unconventional' varieties. Other commentators have broadened the range of variants within symbolic interactionism. All of these approaches emphasize the meaning element in everyday activities.

Similarly, the recent development in symbolic interaction theory lists as sub or related orientations' such approaches as role theory, reference group theory, the social perception and person perception viewpoint, the dramaturgical school, the interpersonal theory of psychiatry proposed by

H.S. Sullivan, the Sapir, Whorf-Cassirer language and culture orientation, phenomenological theory, self-theory, and others (Kuhn) L. Warshay identifies the following varieties in his book *“The Current State of Sociological Theory”*

(1) Blumer school, emphasizing the more subjective aspects; (2) the Iowa School, stressing self-theory and positivistic methodology; (3) an emphasis on interaction with de-emphasis on language; (4) a role theory view with a cognitive emphasis within a moderate scientific tradition; (5) the dramaturgical school, featuring the intricacies of role and self-manipulation; (6) a field-theory version combining Mead, Lewin, and Lundberg; (7) an existential brand; (8) ethnomethodology, stressing the complexity and fluidity of the web of social life within a humanist participatory methodology.

Out of the Welter (disorderly mixture) of schools indicated in the foregoing (preceding) paragraph, Melter, Petras and Reynolds have selected four discussions. These four- the Chicago school, the Iowa school, the dramaturgical approach, and ethnomethodology appear to be clearly distinct orientations within symbolic interactionism together lead an enforced formally administered round of life.” Examining the interaction which takes place from the view point of inmates, Goffman claims that total institutions are “the forcing houses for the changing persons”.

Many of the admission Procedures and future interactions within total institutions not only tend to change but also to mortify the self. In Goffman’s words, “the inmate begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations of self”. Such experiences tend to breakdown inmate’s former self concept. The self is then slowly rebuilt, partly by means of reward and punishments administered by those in authority. Goffman argues that many of the actions of inmates can only be understood with the reference to the strict supervision and mortification of self that occurs in many total institutions.

Not all the inmates respond in the same way to the life in total institutions. Goffman defines five modes of adaptation which an inmate may imply at different stages.

**1. Situational withdrawal-** The inmate withdraws attention from everything except events

2. immediately surrounding his body and minimizes his interaction with others.
3. **Intransigent line-** The inmate flatly refuses to cooperate with the staff and exhibit- its sustained hostility towards the institutions.
4. **Colonization-** The inmate becomes institutionalized; he finds a home and defines life more desirable in the institution than life on outside
5. **Conversion** - Here the inmate (individual) adopts the staff's definition of the model inmate and acts out the part.
6. In most total institutions, the majority of inmates adopt a strategy which some of them call 'playing it cool'. In this circumstance, the inmate will have a maximum chance of eventually getting out physically and psychologically undamaged.

However, interactionist perspective concentrates on small scale social interaction and ignores the wider society. Goffman also gives the little consideration to the inmate experience in the outside world before they entered the total institutions interactionism. In summary, we can say that, as varieties of these orientations share the substantive view that human beings construct their realities in a process of interaction with other human beings. As a corollary each orientation accepts to some degree, the methodological necessity of 'getting inside' the reality of the actor in an effort to of understand this reality as the actor does.

## **11.8 THE CHICAGO AND IOWA SCHOOL**

During the major portion of past generation, the two teaching progenitors of the symbolic interactionist perspective have been H.G. Blumer and M.H. Kuhn. Blumer has elaborated the best-known variety of interactionism- an approach we call the *Chicago School* This approach continues the classical, Median tradition. The *Iowa school* developed through the work of Kuhn and his students at the State University of Iowa. This orientation represents a more eclectic form of interactionism. The two schools differ in important substantive and methodological matters, which can be delineated and illustrated from the writings of the chief progenitor of each school. These matters reflect broader controversies throughout the behaviour disciplines.

We must look elsewhere for clues to the differentiation of the Chicago and Iowa schools. It can be argued plausibly that the most fundamental point of divergence between the Chicago school and Iowa school is that of methodology. We find here as in various disciplines between 'humanistic' and 'scientific' viewpoints. Blumer argues the case for a distinctive methodology in the study of such in all scientific disciplines. Containing the nineteenth century distinction between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, one position proposes an ideographic (or non-generalizing) function for behavioural studies, and the other a nomothetic (or generalizing) function. Thus, while Blumer strives simply 'to make modern society intelligible', Kuhn seeks universal predictions of social conduct. Although both Blumer and Kuhn claim to be interested in what goes on 'inside the heads' of humans, their approaches to this subject-matter differ significantly.

### **11.9 THE DRAMATURGICAL APPROACH: ERVING GOFFMAN**

The major exponent of the dramaturgical approach in Symbolic Interactionism has been Erving Goffman. The point of departure for Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, derived partly from influential ideas of the philosopher critic K. Burke, *is the premise that when human beings interact each desire to 'manage' the impressions the others receive of him/her. In effect, each puts on 'show' for the others.* The preface of Goffman's first monograph in the 'Life of Theater' puts the matter exhibits that of theatrical performances; the principle's derived are dramaturgical ones. We can see such further impressions of his orientations in Goffman's numerous books. *Interaction Ritual: Essays in face-to-Face Behaviour* furnishes a representative set of ideas. In his pursuit of the intricacies of impression-management in face to face, Goffman has relied upon sympathetic introspection at his method of observation of observation and upon a felicitous style of presentation. Goffman's predecessors in the symbolic interactionist perspective (Mead, Dewey, Cooley, Thomas and others) gave no extensive consideration to impression management, insincerity, hypocrisy, or inauthentic self- presentations. His analysis advances, in effect, a significant reconstruction of the image of human beings offered in symbolic interactionism

The dramaturgical approach ignores the macrocosm within its micro-level concerns are imbedded. We have seen that dramaturgical analysis has its detractors, chiefly on the basis of its ideologically unpalatable imagery and, to a lesser extent, its soft methodology. This variety of

interactionism, however, also has its equally ardent admirers. Goffman's other contributions are also equally important to the labeling perspective) the dramatization of evil) on deviance, in Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, and his scintillating depiction of 'Total institutions' in *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates*.

Dramaturgical Analysis: Erving Goffman is one of the most influencing twentieth centuries American Sociologist. His best-known statement of dramaturgical theory, "Presentation of Self in Everyday life", was Published in 1959. Goffman saw much in common between theatrical performance and the kind of 'acts' we all put in our day-to-day actions and interactions. Interaction is seen as very fragile, maintained by social performance. Poor Performance or disruptions are seen as great threat to social interaction just as they are the theatrical performances.

Goffman went quite far in his analogy between the stage and social interaction. In all social interaction there is a 'front region' which is the parallel of the stage front is a theatrical performance. Actors both on the stage and in social life are seen as being interested in appearances, wearing costumes and using Props. Furthermore, in both there is 'back region,' a place to which the actors can retire to prepare themselves for their performance. Backstage of offstage in theater terms, the actors can shed their roles and be themselves.

Dramaturgical analysis is clearly consistent with its symbolic interactionist roots. It has a focus on actors, action and interaction. Working in the same arena as traditional symbolic interactionism, in Goffman found a brilliant metaphor in the theater to shed new light on small-scale social processes.

Interactionist Perspective: Goffman refers organisations to as 'total institutions' which is defined as "a place of residence and work where large number of like situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enforced formally administered round of life." Examining the interaction which takes place from the view point of inmates, Goffman claims that total institutions are "the forcing houses for the changing persons".

Many of the admission Procedures and future interactions within total institutions not only tend to change but also to mortify the self. In Goffman's words, "the inmate begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations of self". Such experiences tend to breakdown inmate's former self concept. The self is then slowly rebuilt, partly by means of reward and punishments administered by those in authority. Goffman argues that many of the actions of inmates can only be understood with the reference to the strict supervision and mortification of self that occurs in many total institutions.

Not all the inmates respond in the same way to the life in total institutions. Goffman defines five modes of adaptation which an inmate may imply at different stages.

1. Situational withdrawal- The inmate withdraws attention from everything except events immediately surrounding his body and minimizes his interaction with others.
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5. In most total institutions, the majority of inmates adopt a strategy which some of them call 'playing it cool'. In this circumstance, the inmate will have a maximum chance of eventually getting out physically and psychologically undamaged.

However, interactionist perspective concentrates on small scale social interaction and ignores the wider society. Goffman also gives the little consideration to the inmate experience in the outside world before they entered the total institutions.

## **11.10 ETHNOMETHODOLOGY**

Several writers have discussed the affinities (for example: Denzin, Dreitzel, Petras and

Meltzer; Wallace Warshay) and the differences (for example: Deutscher, Douglas, Heap and Roth, Hinkle, Zimmerman and Wieder) between ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. Agreeing with Wallace who writes: 'In so far as ethnomethodology embraces a theoretic (rather than methodological) viewpoint, it is clearly symbolic interactionist'. Hence, we shall examine ethnomethodology as a variation of the general interactionist perspective.

Any attempt to grasp the nature of ethnomethodology must come to grips with H. Garfinkel's (leading progenitor of ethnomethodology). Schutz, one of the Garfinkel's mentors at Harvard during his doctoral studies, has also exerted important influence. Additionally, one must acquire a degree of facility with a large array of esoteric concepts, such as the following: 'bracketing', 'deep-rules', 'documentation', 'epoch', 'etcetra clause', 'glossing', 'idealization', 'reduction', 'reflectivity', 'second order', 'conceptions', 'typifications', etc. With this caution in mind, we shall follow the lead of P. Filmer and present some of the many 'definitions', or delimitations of ethnomethodology's scope offered by Garfinkel (Filmer: 1972).

*Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable- for-all-practical purposes, i.e. 'accountable', as organizations of commonplace everyday activities (Reflexive approach). Garfinkel uses the term 'ethnomethodology' to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments or organized artful practices of everyday life.*

Filmer (1972) makes it clear that: according to ethnomethodology, sociology is the study of all aspects of everyday social life, however, trivial they may seem, just as much as it is the study of extraordinary events; and ... sociology is, in an important sense, itself an everyday activity. We have noted the debt owed to the earlier work of phenomenologists, especially A. Schutz. However, ethnomethodology attempts to move beyond the understanding of human behaviour in terms of meanings constructed by each individual in social interaction to a systematic search (documentary interpretation) for the ways in which shared meanings (indexical expressions) come to be granted in human society.

Ethnomethodology has established itself as an important force in the rise or resurgence, over the past few years of the sociology. In works of Cicourel and Douglas in general society, we find depictions flimsy nature of social reality in general society, as well as indications of the ways in which sociologists construct with each other an equally flimsy social reality. Ethnomethodology is interested in the methods' used by the observed and the observer alike for dealing with their everyday life realities. So, ethnomethodology closely approximates to the Chicago school in methodological preferences with emphasis upon sympathetic introspection and participant- observer research. The ethno-methodologists, however, have shown, in many instances, a greater cognizance of the role of history in behaviour, as well as such traditional interactionist concerns as time, place and situation.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1.a) What is Symbolic Interaction. Explain in two lines.**

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**b) “The Coming Crisis in Western Sociology” is a work done by**

- a) William James
- b) Gouldner
- c) Erving Goffman
- d) C.H Cooley

**2. James used three concepts especially in the development of Symbolic Interactionism.**

**These were ‘Habit,’ ‘Instinct’ and -----**

- a) Self
- b) Ego
- c) Group

d) Society

**3. a) ----- is the father of American Sociology.**

a) W.I Thomas

b) W.E.B Dubois

c) Lester Frank Ward

d) George Ritzer

**b) The concept of “Looking Glass Self” has been developed by**

a) G.H Mead

b) W.T Thomas

c) John Dewey

d) C.H Cooley

Much of the criticism leveled against ethnomethodology is directed at it as both a sociological theory and a methodological approach. Dreitzel (1970) in *Recent Sociology*, contends that ethnomethodology tends to cut off all macro sociological considerations for the time being in order to concentrate on the basic rules of everyday communication and interaction’ (x our emphasis). Ethnomethodologists claim, he writes: ‘Until we have understood how we... understand each other, all further sociological inquiry will be useless’.

Gouldner puts forward the view in the coming Crisis in western Sociology, that, Garfinkel’s is sociology more congenial to the activist 1960s and particularly to the more politically rebellious campuses or the present period’. Warshay (1971:25), too opines that *ethnomethodology is a sociology of instigation*.

### **11.11 CRITICISM OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

Brittan’s (1973) criticisms of general symbolic interaction perspective are summarized as below:

1. Interactionism places an over-emphasis on self-consciousness.
2. Symbolic interactionism is guilty of an unwarranted demotion of the psychological.
3. The interactionist perspective has come to have an obsession as the meaning.
4. Interactionist too often sees only the pejorative implications of the fragmentation of self.
5. Symbolic interactionist's relativistic analysis of social interaction often results in an over emphasis on the situation.
6. Interactionism espouses a metaphysic of meaning.

In addition, there are after symbolic interactionists whose critical comments, while not as systematically stated.

### **11.12 LET US SUM UP**

William James contributed to symbolic interactionism by emphasizing that meaning is created through social interaction, focusing on the development of the self as a social process and the importance of the "I" (the individual's active response) and the "me" (the socialized self) in shaping identity. His work highlighted the adaptive and teleological nature of the human mind, which evolves to interpret and respond to the world through symbols, making humans active agents in their social environments rather than passive recipients of stimuli.

John Dewey emphasizes that individuals create their reality through the subjective interpretation of symbols in social interactions. Dewey's focus on the practical, experience-based, and interactive nature of human understanding and social change provided a foundational intellectual framework that aligned with the emerging "bottom-up" perspective of symbolic interactionism.

G.H. Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism posits that society is constructed through shared meanings derived from social interaction, and the self is a social product that develops through this process. Individuals do not react directly to events but act based on their interpretations, which are shaped by the social interactions and these human interactions relies on symbols, especially language, to create and share meaning.

### 11.13 GLOSSARY

**1.Geisteswissenschaften-** is a German term that translates to humanities, liberal arts, or arts in English, referring to fields like history, philosophy, literature, linguistics, and religious studies, which study the human experience and culture rather than the natural world.

**2.Naturwissenschaften-** It refers to the branch of knowledge concerned with the physical world and its phenomena, encompassing fields like biology, chemistry, and physics.

### 11.14 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write in brief about the concept of symbolic Interactionism.

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2. Give a brief account on the varieties of symbolic Interactionism.

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3. Give a detail account of dramaturgical approach given by Erving Goffman.

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## 11.15 LESSON END EXERCISE

### Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of these are not involved in the development of Interactionism in social theory.

- a) C.H Cooley
- b) John Dewey
- c) Durkheim
- d) G.H. Mead

2. Match the following:

- |                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. C.H Cooley       | a) Dramaturgical Approach |
| 2. Erving Goffman   | b) Looking Glass Self     |
| 3. G.H Mead         | c) Ethnomethodology       |
| 4. Harold Garfinkel | d) Generalized other      |
- a) 1-b, 2-a, 3-d, 4-c
  - b) 1-a, 2-b, 3-c, 4-d
  - c) 1-c, 2-b, 3-d, 4-c
  - d) 1-d, 2-c, 3-b, 4-a

3. The book “Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind” was authored by:

- a) Max Weber
- b) Auguste Comte
- c) C.H. Cooley
- d) Herbert Spencer

**4. Erving Goffman applied the concept of the dramaturgical model to social life, viewing social interaction as like a:**

- a) Competition between opposing forces.
- b) Bureaucratic Hierarchy
- c) Performance in a theatre
- d) biological organism

**5. According to symbolic interactionism, where do meanings of objects and behaviors come from:**

- a) Meanings are inherent in the objects themselves.
- b) Meanings are determined by social structures.
- c) Meanings are derived from genetic factors.
- d) Meanings are developed through social interaction and interpretation.

**Answers: 1-c, 2-a, 3-c, 4-c, 5-d**

### **11.16 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. H. Blumer (1969), *Interactionism, Perspective and Method*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall.
2. H. Blumer (1962), "Society and Symbolic Interaction, in *Human Behaviour and Social Process*, ed. Arnold M. Rose, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.
3. Abraham, M. Francis (1982), *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. Kinloch, Graham .C (1977), *Sociological Theory: Its Development and Major Paradigms*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

5. Shibutani, Tamotsu (1961), *Society and Personality: An Interactionist Approach to Social Psychology*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

### **11.17 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: Answers: 1a-b, 2-a, 3a-c, 3b-d**

**Lesson-12**

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM:**

**G. H. MEAD**

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**STRUCTURE**

- 12.0 Learning Objectives**
- 12.1 Introduction**
- 12.2 George Herbert Mead (1963-1931)**
- 12.3 Mind, Self and Society**
  - 12.3.1 Mind**
  - 12.3.2 The Self**
  - 12.3.3 The Generalized Other**
- 12.4 Functions of Self**
  - 12.4.1 Communication**
  - 12.4.2 Analysis of the Situation**
  - 12.4.3 Self-Direction and Control**
  - 12.4.4 Self-Judgment**
  - 12.4.5 Identity**
  - 12.4.6 Mind and Problem-solving**
- 12.5 Society**

**12.6 Methodology**

**12.7 Criticism**

**12.8 Let us Sum up**

**12.9 Glossary**

**12.10 Self-Assessment Questions**

**12.11 Lesson End Exercise**

**12.12 Suggested Readings**

**12.13 Answers to check your progress**

## **12.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- **understand the concept of Mind, Self and Society;**
- **know the various functions of self; and**
- **understand the methodology of G.H. Mead**

## **12.1 INTRODUCTION**

Symbolic interactionism is an American product and for long periods its organizational focus was the University of Chicago. In lectures delivered at that university between 1894 and 1931 George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) articulated the main ideas. Herbert Blumer, who has coined the term Symbolic Interactionism, a student of Mead at Chicago, in a series of papers written over many years, sought to show the sociological relevance of Mead's teaching. Although, the basic idea of symbolic interactionism date back towards the beginning of the century, they have remained relevant because they have served to provide a minority tradition, at odds with the prevailing doctrines of American sociology.

Symbolic interactionism is essentially a social-psychological perspective that is particularly relevant to sociological enterprise. Instead of dealing with abstract social structures, concrete forms of individual behaviour or inferred psychic characteristics, Symbolic interactionism focuses on the nature of interaction, the dynamic patterns of social action and social relationship. Interaction, the dynamic itself is taken as the unit of analysis: attitudes are relegated to the background. Both the human beings and the social structure are conceptualized as more complex, unpredictable and active than in the conventional sociological perspectives. Societies are composed of interacting individuals who do not only react but perceive, interpret, act and create. The individual is not a bundle of attitudes but a dynamic and changing actor, always in the process of becoming and never fully formed. Social milieu is not something static 'out there' always influencing and shaping us but essentially an interaction process. The individual has not only a mind but also a self which is not a psychological entity but an aspect of social process that arises in the course of social experience and activity. Above all, the entire process of interaction is symbolic, with meanings constructed

by human ingenuity. The meanings we share with others, our definition of the social world and our perception of, and response to, reality emerge in the process of interaction.

Mead and Blumer describe the symbolic aspects of interaction and its structural contingencies. Both are well known for their development of *symbolic interactionism*.

## **12.2 GEORGE HERBERT MEAD (1863-1931)**

Like Durkheim and a number of other early sociologists, Mead was born to a religious family. He grew up on the campus of Oberlin College, where his father, a Protestant minister, taught preaching. Mead's mother returned to teaching after his father's early death and later became president of Mount Holyoke College. Mead studied at Harvard with William James a few years after Du Bois had finished his studies there. Like Du Bois and W.I. Thomas and (and Many others), Mead also studied in Germany before beginning his teaching career. In 1891, he taught philosophy at the University of Michigan, where he encountered Charles Horton Cooley and John Dewey. One year later he joined the philosophy faculty at the new University of Chicago, whose department of sociology was just being organized. Mead had little direct control with the sociologists, but the social justice teachings of his father influenced his association with Jane Addams's Hull House and with other progressive activists in the city.

## **12.3 MIND, SELF AND SOCIETY**

Mead's best-known book *Mind, self and Society*, was compiled from lecture notes for the course in social psychology that he taught until his death in 1931. "The Self, the I, and the Me" is from the portions of that book in which Mead most precisely develops his version of the social self as a double dialogue- with the social world, externally, and between the "I" and the "Me" internally. Mead's theory of the social self was an important advance over James and Cooley and is considered a classic source for subsequent social theories of the self, both normal and deviant.

On more than one occasion, John Dewey, the father of American instrumental pragmatism and of a progressive educational philosophy, observed that Mead was the most creative philosophical mind of his day. William James, C.H. Cooley, and James Mark Baldwin all

influenced Mead in some manner, but none so much as Dewey himself. And yet, Mead's contributions to human understanding resulted from his own creative capacity to spin out of his thoughts, gleaned from broadly and deeply developed ideas, a coherent theory of social life. Primarily, this was done by linking together the emergence of the human mind, the social self, and the structures of society as these three elements conspire in the initiation and fostering of social interaction.

This synthesis, which we shall subsequently explore in detail, made two overriding assumptions, viz.

1. that the bio-physiological frailty of the human organism necessitated cooperation as a deterrent to special extinction,
2. and that those social mechanisms (verbal, gestural, etc.) which evolved through cooperation among individuals would endure through time.

### **12.3.1 MIND**

The three-fold foundation upon which Mead built his theory was Mind, Self, and Society. Mind is an emergent phenomenon of personal awareness on the part of the infant individual, of meaningful gestures selected out of whole range of indiscriminate, experiential physical motions. Mind develops with the child's capacity to distinguish his and others 'on- sense motions and significant gestures; the latter mead calls 'conventional gestures'. A wink, for example, takes to itself a 'common meaning' which the mind discovers and employs within society. The child experiments with this gesture until he can mimic not only its physical appearance but can convey to others it's symbolic meaning. As the child's mind develops (Cooley, it will be recalled, would be speaking here of human organizations), there is a simultaneous increase in social communication skills. Just as his physical dexterity develops with practice, such as climbing a ladder or riding a bicycle, so also his capacity to interact meaningfully through symbolic interaction by means of conventional gesturing develops. The more developed the mind in terms of symbolic interaction skills, the more sophisticated the level of meaningful communication among individuals. This ability to use and interpret social gestures greatly facilitates the development of mind, self, and society.

Mind emerges out of this maturing capacity of the child to distinguish and discriminate the symbols of interaction, by perceiving, conceiving, and interpreting gestures and language. By so doing, the child develops the capacity to assume the posture or perspective of the one with whom he is interacting, that is, the child is able to conceptualize another person's point of view. Mead calls this the ability to 'take the role of the other'. As we have seen, for Mead, the mind evolves when the child is able to (1) understand and use 'conventional gestures', (2) 'to employ the gestures' to 'take the role of the other', and (3) to imaginatively rehearse alternative lines of action. This third point, what Mead like to call 'imaginative rehearsal', illustrates his conception of mind as a 'process' of intellectual activity, not as a static structure. In order for an individual to 'think about' what he will do before he actually does it, and to consider alternative forms of action before making a choice of action, he must 'rehearse' his decision, i.e., he must imagine his action before he acts. For this, says Mead, mind must be present. In order that society might exists and persist, mankind must have developed the capacity to imaginatively rehearse alternative lines of behaviour. Otherwise, no self could have evolved and no society could have developed. Man is not primarily an animal with instinctual behaviour of stimulus-response, but is human with a mind for rational judgment and freedom of decision. In this context, Mead distinguished between 'stimuli and 'object'- animals respond to stimuli whereas man responds to objects. A stimulus, explains mead, does not have an intrinsic character that acts upon individuals whereas the meaning of an object is conferred upon it by the individual. Animals and human beings alike react to stimuli, but only man acts toward an object. 'The individual is not surrounded by a world of pre-existing objects that coerce him; rather, he builds up his environment of objects according to his ongoing activity'.

### **12.3.2 THE SELF**

Mead argued for a conception of mind as an emergent concomitant of society- that is, mind and society as coincidental phenomena. And if forced into a causal statement of which came first, Cooley would say that mind produces communication, and Mead would argue that mind arises within communication. Communication as meaningful interaction, for Mead, begins in random gesturing-both verbal and non-verbal- which through as process of selective experimenting, evolves a repertoire of 'significant gestures' and spoken sounds converging so as to create mind.

As the father of symbolic interaction, Mead made a distinction between gesture and symbol. Gesture is a social act that operates as a stimulus for the response of another organism (animals) engaged in the same act. Symbol is a 'significant gesture' which conveys a 'meaning' to which only human beings can respond. Therefore, whereas a gesture may produce a stimulus in an animal, only man is truly symbol-using, symbol-making animal; i.e., animal symbolism. When a gesture, e.g., a wink of an eye, evokes the same meaning from the receiver of the gesture, i.e., the wink, as from the sender (of the wink), this gesture is a 'significant gesture', or symbol. When vocal gestures (speech) reach this receiver- sender consensus of meaning, language is the result.

Symbolic interaction as meaningful communication occurs primarily through the capacity of individuals to take the role of the other, or simply 'role-taking. Significant gestures, i.e., symbols, are significant because of their 'self-conscious' quality in man whereas non-significant gestures are non-significant, i.e., non-symbolic, due to their 'non-self-conscious' quality in animals. Significant gestures as meaning-conveying symbols rely upon 'an arousal in the individual himself of the response which he is calling out in the individual, a taking of the role of the other, a tendency to act as the other person acts' Mead:1977).

'I' and "me", most notable a contribution of the Mead to the study of human relationships is comprehension of self-consciousness, its genesis and its sociality. The symbol arouses in one's self what it arouses in the other individual. The mature self, arises when a 'generalized other' is internalized so that 'the community exercise control over the conduct of its individual members. The self's essence is its reflective self-awareness, and with this essential capacity, an individual can be both an object 'me' and a subject 'I' to himself. This dual capacity is the essence of being social.

Mead was not a social determinist by which is meant a belief that what the individual is or becomes is fundamentally determined by his social environment. Mead was more organic and dynamic in his theory of man in society. The self for mead was not simply a bag of social attitudes picked up in the environment. He used such concepts as 'self-image', 'self-concept', 'taking the role of the other', and 'significant others' to explain the creative balance which exists between the individual and society. His

suggestion that through development of a mature self-consciousness, the individual becomes both an object and a subject to himself is a profound insight. He points out: 'it is the response of the organism (individual) to the attitudes of others; the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which one assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized "me" and then one reacts toward that as an "I".'

Thus, according to Mead, the 'self' is made up of the 'I' and 'me'. The 'I' represents the impulsive tendencies and the spontaneous behaviour of the human infant- that behaviour which is unconditioned and undisciplined whereas 'me' is the social component of self- the internalized demands of society. Over time, the process of continuous interaction with parents and significant others give rise to the concept of 'me' which enables the individual to restrain and regulate the behaviour of 'I' in accordance with the established norms of the group or society. Mead suggested that self-consciousness emerges in three evolutionary stages, viz., (1) the stage of imitative acts, (2) the play stage, and (3) the game stage. The imitative stage, says Mead, occurs about the second year of life during which time the young child mimics the mannerism and behavioural patterns of his parents, siblings (brothers and sisters) and other 'significant others', i.e., people in his immediate social environments. The play stage begins about the third year which is characterized by the child's growing interest in assuming various role of his 'significant others', for example, playing mother, father, big sister, etc. The third and final stage of self-consciousness development during which time, the child had developed the capacity to 'take the role of the others', not just of one other and not just of one role, but he is able to assume the attitudes of several people comprising his social group all at one time. Whether it be perceiving the various and conflicting attitudes of his parents and siblings during a moment of family feuding or an ability to really play in a baseball game or chess, he is able to enter into the human interaction because he can 'imagine' the role of others.

The third stage is, of course, very complex and indicates real maturity in consciousness of the self and others. Rational, adaptive behaviour is an indicator of mature self-consciousness. This maturity occurs when an individual is able to mentally perceive, understand, and employ the symbolic meanings of his own gestures and those of others. During this process, says Mead, the self has the unique quality of being an object to itself. Mead believed with Cooley that an individual cannot experience himself except through the eyes of gestures of others. Mead puts it this way:

“The individual enters his own experience as a self... not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience, and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behaviour in which both he and they are involved”.

### **12.3.3 THE GENERALIZED OTHER**

The effectiveness of Mead’s rational conception of the balancing duality of self and society, or self-consciousness and social consciousness, is illustrated in his explanation are essentially products of social habits which have evolved as effective means of establishing and fostering social order. Social control, which is necessarily operative in any viable social order, exists fundamentally as a social expression of individual self-control. Self-control is social consciousness inevitably when individuals feel inwardly or subjectively obliged to honour the rights of others within the social group.

But for the emergence of ‘the generalized other’, social institutions, social order, and social control could not be. Through the growth and development of the self, the generalized other represents that stage at which the individual is finally able to relate to himself as object and subject, as ‘I’ and ‘me’\_ the attitudes and values of his social environment. The generalized other is identified with an organized community or social group which fosters a sense of enduring selfhood, of continuous self-integrity and personal identity through a continuously expanding number of social circles. The larger community (from small cohesive groups to giant bureaucracies) can express an attitude or value, says Mead, only because it is present in each individual’s mind as the attitude or value of the generalized other.

In summary, Mead insists that ‘self’ is neither a psychological organism nor a biological entity but essentially a social process which arises in social experience and activity. Social interaction, communication and group processes introduce the self into which the individual organizes all his experiences. Thus, an individual forms the concept of self in the process of meaningful interaction with significant others. How does an individual, for instance, come to acquire his self-concept of being “intelligent”?

is intelligent, he is not intelligent because he thinks other think he is intelligent. It is the response of others who seek his advice and expertise and his perception of this experience with them that gave him his self-concept of being intelligent. Thus, individuals come to acquire a variety of self-concepts such as 'beautiful', 'timid', 'honest', 'outgoing', etc. from their experience with the significant social group.

Mead has spoken with insightful sensitivity of the relationship of the adaptable 'self-mage' to the more stable 'self-conception', realizing that though individuals rightly and necessarily attempt to fit in a social group by 'defining the situation' and adapting to it, they nevertheless have an enduring sense of their continuous selfhood throughout a variety of different social situations.

## **12.4 FUNCTIONS OF SELF**

### **12.4.1 Communication**

The self serves as an object of communication. Mead declares that 'the essence of the self... is cognitive: it lies in the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking, or in terms of which thought or reflection proceeds (Charon: 1979). Since human communication is essentially symbolic, without the self-man would not be able to communicate with him or others, because. As Mead observes: What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one's self what it arouses in the other individual.

### **12.4.2 Analysis of the Situation**

The self enables the individual to analyze each situation and to decide what line of action to take. Since the individual experiences himself not directly but in terms of the self, the most basic person in the situation, he takes stock of all elements in the situation in relation to the self. In other words, 'selfhood allows us to examine situations and how they affect us and to determine the kind of action we might take by imaginatively testing proposed action first on its effects on the self, that object we seem to know the best.

### **12.4.3 Self- Direction and Control**

The importance of the self lies in the recognition that the individual can be the object of his own actions. He can act toward himself in much the same way he acts toward others. Just as he might control and manipulate others, he can direct and control the self. Indeed, the individual must be able to respond to a self-image before he seeks to control himself or others. Thus, in the symbolic interactionist perspective, the individual does not passively react to external stimuli; he perceives, interprets, organizes his thoughts, considers his options and chooses a line of action.

### **12.4.4 Self-Judgment**

The individual evaluates his self-image in terms of his experience with others. Like other meanings sentiments toward one-self are formed and reinforced in the regularized responses of other people. Through role-taking a proud man is able to visualize himself as an object toward which others have feelings of respect, admiration or even awe. If others consistently address him with deference, he comes to take it for granted that he deserves such treatment. On the other hand, if someone is consistently mistreated or ridiculed, he cannot help but conclude that others despise him. If a person is always ignored, especially in situations in which others like him are given attention, he may become convinced that he is comparatively worthless object. Once such estimates have crystallized, they become more independent of the responses of other people.

### **12.4.5 Identity**

To furnish our identities is one of the essential functions of the self. In the process of social interaction and experience, the self receives the labels, names and other aspects of identity which others have for us and transform them as our own. The self organizes our knowledge of 'who we are' and what we think of ourselves in terms of our perception of others' responses. Thus, the individual comes to think of himself as 'shy', handsome or 'timid' because these are precisely the labels which he thinks the social world has attributed to him.

### **12.4.6 Mind and Problem-solving**

The self not activates the mind; indeed. It makes that activity possible at all. Because of mind, human beings develop an active relationship to their environment; rather than just responding to stimuli; they evaluate environmental stimuli and consciously select appropriate response. Mead notes: “Consciousness is involved 2where there is a problem, where one is deliberately adjusting one’ self to the world, trying to get out of difficulty or pain. One is aware of experience and is trying to readjust the situation so that conduct can go ahead. There is, therefore, no consciousness in a world that is just there. When self-interprets an identity as unacceptable (a timid or boring person) or perceives the attainment of a prized reward (honour or money) as being blocked, mind treats it as a problem and proceeds to work out a strategy to deal with the situation.

### **12.5 Society**

The third dimension in Mead’s perception of the social world is society and self and mind serve as the interaction ingredients which eventuate in social order. Society is a human construction. Society is an organized activity which is essentially regulated by the generalized other and the arena within which individuals out of the complex interactional adjustments- conflict, compromise, innovation, and cooperation- which occur in human communications. As mind and self-negotiate the parameters and operational rules of social discourse, society’s order and institutions are sometimes altered, reconstructed, or disassembled. Social change, consequently, is both likely and unpredictable- likely due to the dynamics of human interaction and unpredictable- likely due to the dynamics of human interaction and unpredictable due to the freedom of spontaneity in mind and self.

The institution of society which represent the organized and patterned interaction among a variety of individuals, are dependent for both their emergence and persistence upon mind and self. Through the agency of mind, by means of which the individual takes roles and imaginatively rehearses optional and alternative actions, coordinated activity among several individuals is made possible. Through the agency of self, especially the self’s ability to critically evaluate its own attitudes and behaviour from the point of view of the generalized other, the social control needed in any meaningful and

sustained coordinated activity would be impossible. For Mead, the fundamental process to be studied and understood, in addition to the emergent processes of self-consciousness, is the dynamic relationship, sometimes creative, sometimes destructive, but always organic, which exists between mind and self out of which society is generated. Mead's view of this dynamic relationship led him to believe that society, due to its constituent elements of mind and self is constantly in a state of flux and rife with potential.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1. Mind, Self and Society is a book written by**

- a) Erving Goffman
- b) G.H Mead
- c) Max Weber
- d) Garfinkel

**2. Herbert Blumer was the student of**

- a) G.H Mead
- b) Durkheim
- c) W.I Thomas
- d) None of the above

**3. Mead insists that self is neither a psychological organism nor a biological entity but essentially a social process which arises in social experience and entity (True or False).**

## **12.6 METHODOLOGY**

Mead argued that in order for the human community to make progress in the quality of social life, it must apply scientific method to social problem. Mead, like Dewey, was a thoroughgoing pragmatist and nowhere is this philosophical predisposition better reflected than in his scientific method.

For Mead, there are two sources of sociological understanding of man's social world. First there is behavioristic psychology, not positivistic behaviorism- which enables the social scientists to apprehend intelligence in terms of human activity. Without this capacity of the scientific community to perceive and understand not just behaviour as activity but human behaviors as social activity, the social scientists would be relegated to a simplistic analysis of human behaviors in terms of animal stimulus-response. But man can understand human behaviors by looking at 'action' and by apprehending 'intelligence'. The second source for understanding man's social world is the process of scientific research, a rigorous and non-doctrinal method which is self-revising and consistently critical of its findings, of its hypotheses, and of its conclusions. Through this dual emphasis upon behavioristic psychology (action and intellection) and scientific method (critical research), the social scientist is able to approach the data of the social world with both confidence in method and expectation in understanding. As explained by Collins, Mead methodological pragmatism included three assumptions or stages. First, as with the whole school of pragmatic philosophy, a hypothesis is considered true if it works when tested. Second, there was a fundamental belief that within human conduct there lays a process of knowing. And third, there was a confidence that knowledge is a process of acquiring the necessary 'scientific apparatus' (including ideas, concepts, units of analysis, theoretical models, paradigms, equations, etc.) to carry out the desirable task of social reconstruction in a democratic state.

## **12.7 CRITICISM**

As with any creative venture in the frontier regions of theory building, Mead's profound legacy in American sociology was not without its shortcomings. It is probably fairer to say that his theory necessitated further clarifications which he himself did not make, either because he was unable to see the more because of

time. Though his insights were often profound in terms of the evolution of self-consciousness in society, he was not sufficiently clear in his explication of the nature of social organization in society. Also, and as a result of this particular impression, the points of contact between the individual and society were occasionally unclear. His major contribution, viz. that mind and self-generated society and that society affected mind and self, needs much working order that its full implications might be realized. Of course, Mead could not cover all fronts in his sociological work. This field is too broad. However, it is to be regretted that he did not turn his inquiring mind to the problems of power and social stratification, of class and social mobility. Nevertheless, though his methodology sometimes defies duplication and is often too rationalistic and optimistically progressive for our day, his theories of mind, self, and society and of the social consequences of personal change is still main-line theories without which modern sociology would be considerably less than it is.

## **12.8 LET US SUM UP**

It can be summarized that the mind, self, and society are not innate but are products of social interaction, communication, and shared symbols. The self develops by internalizing the attitudes of others and the generalized other, or the community's shared perspective. This process requires communication through language (significant symbols), engaging in play by taking on different roles, and participating in games to understand organized rules and the perspectives of others.

## **12.9 GLOSSARY**

### **1. The "I" and the "Me":**

**1.1 The "Me":** is the socialized aspect of the self, representing the internalized attitudes of society and its expectations.

**1.2 The "I":** is the individual's spontaneous, unique, and unsocialized response to the "Me".

**2. The Generalized Other:** A crucial concept representing the general attitudes, expectations, and viewpoints of the community or society as a whole.

## 12.10 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the concept of Mind, Self and Society.

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2. Write a brief sketch on George Herbert Mead.

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## 12.11 LESSON END EXERCISE

### Multiple Choice Questions

**1. What is the primary focus of symbolic interactionism as developed by George Herbert Mead**

- a) Macro-level social structures and institutions
- b) The role of symbols, gestures, and language in creating social reality and self-identity
- c) The economic systems and class struggle in society
- d) The impact of large-scale social institutions on individual behavior

**2. According to Mead, the self is developed through a process that includes which of the following.**

- a) An innate biological drive to conform
- b) Learning a specific set of rules and norms from an early age
- c) social interaction, particularly through gestures and the ability to take the role of the other
- d) A struggle with the social forces that limit individual freedom

**3. The collection of attitudes, roles, and viewpoints of others in society that a person can imagine or adopt is called ----- in Mead's theory.**

**4. Which of the following represents the "I" in Mead's concept of the self.**

- a) The socialized self that responds to the expectations of others
- b) The organized part of the personality that reflects the roles and attitudes of others
- c) The unsocialized, impulsive, and creative part of the self
- d) The part of the self that is developed through interaction with the "generalized other"

**5. Mead argues that human beings act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them, and these meanings are derived from:**

- a) Innate biological programming
- b) Personal experiences only
- c) social interaction
- d) Formal education

**Answers: 1-b, 2-c, 3-Generalized other, 4-c, 5-c**

**12.12 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Abraham, M. Francis (1982), *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. Kinloch, Graham .C (1977), *Sociological Theory: Its Development and Major Paradigms*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
3. Zeitlin, Irving M. (1987) *Rethinking Sociology: A Critique of Contemporary Theory*, Jaipur” Rawat Publications.

**12.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-b, 2-a, 3-True.**

**STRUCTURE**

- 13.0 Learning Objectives**
- 13.1 Introduction**
- 13.2 Aims**
- 13.3 Assumptions**
- 13.4 Methodology**
- 13.5 The Typology**
- 13.6 Let us sum up**
- 13.7 Glossary**
- 13.8 Self-Assessment Questions**
- 13.9 Lesson End Exercise**
- 13.10 Suggested Readings**
- 13.11 Answers to check your progress**

## 13.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, after going through this lesson, you will acquire knowledge about:

- the concept of symbolic Interactionism given by Herbert Blumer; and
- Gain knowledge about the various assumptions given by Herbert Blumer.

## 13.1 INTRODUCTION

Blumer was educated at the University of Missouri, where he obtained his B.A. and M.A. degrees in 1921 and 1922 respectively. He then moved to the University of Chicago, where he experienced the strong influence of Mead and completed his Ph.D. in 1929. He stayed on in Chicago for some years, moving in the 1950s to Berkeley where he has remained. His intellectual interests focus on social psychology, collective behaviour, and mass communications. He is responsible for developing the term *symbolic interactionism* and has made major contributions to this particular type of theory in sociology. His works include numerous articles on race relations, collective behavior, and mass communications. The most authoritative collection of his work, however, is *symbolic interactionism, Perspective and Method* (1969); it is this work that concerns us in our present discussion.

It was Herbert Blumer who, in 1937, in an article entitled “Social Psychology”, coined the term “symbolic interaction” to denote the approach represented by such thinkers as Charles H. Cooley, W.I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, E.W. Burgess, Florian Znaniecki, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. In a later essay, “Society and Symbolic Interaction”, Blumer argues that Mead, more than any others, laid out the main premises of this approach, though he did not “develop its methodological implications for sociological study” (Blumer: 1962).

Symbolic interaction, writes Blumer, “refers... to the peculiar and distinctive character to interaction as it takes place between human beings.” Actors do not simply react to each other but interpret and define each other’s actions. An actor’s response is not immediate and direct but rather based on an assessment of the meaning of the act. Human interaction is therefore mediated by the use of symbols, “by interpretation or by ascertaining the meaning of another’s actions”

(Blumer: 1962).

Blumer then goes to other premises, which may be summarized as follows: The human being has a “self”, that is he can make himself the object of his own actions, or act toward himself as he might act toward others. This enables the individual to make indications to himself, and these self-indications are what we call consciousness. Anything the individual is conscious of, ranging from the ticking of a clock to an abstruse meaning is a self-indication, and the conscious life of human being is a steady flow of such self-indications. Further, the self and its constitution mediated by language enables the human being to abstract something from his surroundings, and to give it meaning- to “make it into an object”. The object is no more stimuli but is constituted by the individual’s disposition to act. In these terms, human tend to construct and reconstruct their actions and hence their world.

### **13.2 AIMS**

Blumer is concerned with developing a symbolic interactionist theory of society, symbolic interaction referring to “the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings” (Blumer: 1969). This peculiarity consists of the reciprocal and symbolic interpretation of each other’s action. Sociology, according to this perspective, is concerned with “the interpretive process by means of which human beings, individually and collectively, act in human society” (ibid: 1969). Such a paradigm conceptualizes society as a system of interpretive processes governing behaviour. The main premises of the symbolic interactionist approach are, therefore, that human society is made up of individuals who have selves (that is make indications to themselves); that individual action is a construction and not a release, being built up by the individual through noting and interpreting features of the situations in which he acts; that group or collective action consists of the aligning of individual actions, brought about by the individual’s interpreting or taking into account each other’s actions.

Symbolic interaction, it is important to note, is opposed to positing “factors” or “forces” and explaining human conduct in those terms. Even when such forces are lodged in the “social system”, “social structure”, etc., this procedure is opposed by symbolic interactionists because it treats individuals as “media through which such factors operate” and denies or ignores that it is

individuals who act “by making indications to themselves” (Blumer: 1962).

Similarly, symbolic interaction opposes psychological factors and forces: “the self” is not brought into the picture by introducing such items as organic drives, motives, attitudes, feelings, internalized social factors or psychological components. Such psychological factors have the same status as the social factors mentioned: they are regarded as factors which play on the individual to produce his action. They do not constitute the process of self-indication” (Blumer: 1962).

### **13.3 ASSUMPTIONS**

Building on the work of Mead, Blumer makes a number of basic assumptions concerning social reality, as follows:

1. “People, individually and collectively, are prepared to act on the basis of the meanings of the objects that comprise their world” (ibid: 1969:50). Behaviour is based on social meanings accorded particular objects. These objects are of three major types: physical (e.g., trees), social (e.g., priests), and abstract (e.g., moral principles).
2. Associations represent a “process in which...(people)... are making indications to one another and interpreting each other’s indications” (ibid: 1069:50), i.e., human action is interpreted and constructed.
3. “Social acts are constructed through a process in which the actors note, interpret, and assess the situations confronting them.” (ibid: 1969:50). The human being is thus an acting organism with a self which participates in role making. The individual thus interacts with itself in the interpretive process.
4. Finally, “the complex interlinks ages of acts that comprise organizations, institutions, division of labour, and networks of interdependency are moving and not static affairs” (ibid: 1969:50). Accordingly, societies or groups, since they exist in interaction, are dynamic and formative rather than static. As articulated lines of action, they are neither pre-established nor do they possess an existence separate from that of their participants in interaction. On the other hand, the previous actions of these participants provide the background for any instance of joint action.

To summarize, society consists of living lines of action, formed through the process of interpretive interaction which is guided by particular objects and defined by particular group contexts. According to this perspective, society represents a symbolic, interactive, interpretive process located within the individual; it is not a static, external system.

#### **13.4 METHODOLOGY**

The above assumptions, according to Blumer, require a particular kind of methodology: the utilization of a more naturalistic type of inquiry (i.e., a method which goes “directly to the empirical social world” in contrast to predefined models), focusing on exploration and inspection, and the natural ongoing character of the empirical world (Ibid: 1969:46). More specifically, Blumer advocates a ‘naturalistic ‘approach to research.

It involves the examination of particular instances of social life as they occur in their usual settings. They should be studied with some care and in some detail. The researcher should aim to see the world in the same way as those people he is studying. He should be prepared to live along with them throughout the course of their daily routines and to expose himself to those experiences which they typically encounter. He should aim for a sympathetic and sensitive understanding of their general outlook on the world. He should aim, too, to see how those processes which we talk about through our sociological abstractions (birth-rates, social roles, systems of authority, and so on) can be seen as organized patterns of conduct and social interaction across the span of daily experience. This approach emphasizes the need to place oneself in the role of the participant, take the dynamics of interaction seriously, develop “pictures” of social action (i.e., observe the process by which social action is constructed), and view institutions and groups dynamically (i.e., as arrangements of people linked in action). Methodology appropriate to symbolic interactionism is empathetic, dynamic and inductive in contrast to the artificially imposed, static, and deductive methods typical of traditional, “scientific” sociology. Such an approach, once again, represent a further elaboration and application of Mead’s work.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I**

**1.The term Symbolic Interactionism was coined by**

- a) G.H Mead
- b) Herbert Blumer
- c) Goffman
- d) Dilthey

**2.According to Symbolic Interactionism, “the self” is brought into the picture by introducing such items as organic drives, motives, attitudes, feelings, internalized social factors or psychological components (True or False).**

**3.According to Blumer, behavior is based on social meaning accorded to objects. These objects are of three major types: Physical, social and -----**

- a) Cognitive
- b) Ideological
- c) Abstract
- d) Psychological

### **13.5 THE TYPOLOGY**

As in case of social behaviourism typologies implicit in social-psychological theory are more models of social reality than types of social structure or society. In this respect Blumer’s theory differs little: his typology of social reality is implicit in the assumptions (his or her background, self-object, role taking), objects (physical, social, abstract), and others (their background etc.) all of which represent an ongoing, dynamic, symbolic, interactive, and interpretive system located within the individuals concerned.

## 13.6 LET US SUM UP

Blumer's concept of society differs markedly from those of organic-structure- functionalists and conflict-radical theorists. Blumer sees society as consisting of living lines of action, formed through the process of interpretive interaction which is guided by particular objects and defined by particular group contexts. Society thus represents a symbolic, interactive, interpretive process located within the individual.

Such a perspective is bound to raise a number of critical issues:

1. To what extent, for example, is this perspective or conceptual framework rather than a theory? In terms of an explanatory structure, it is clearly lacking.
2. The extent to which Blumer moves significantly beyond the work of Mead represents another problem.
3. While rejecting functionalism and imposed definitions of social reality, one can argue that ultimately symbolic interactionism is systemic form. Thus, while the context of interaction may vary, its structure or form is relatively uniform.
4. It can also be argued that naturalistic methods will eventually result in some kind of imposed analysis of any empirical situation- a problem which cannot be avoided.

## 13.7 GLOSSARY

1. **Symbolic Interaction:** Blumer coined this term to describe how humans interact by interpreting each other's actions and using shared symbols.

## 13.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the concept of mind, Self and Society.

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2. Write a brief sketch on Herbert Blumer.

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### 13.9 LESSON END EXERCISE

#### Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is not one of Herbert Blumer's three core premises of symbolic interactionism.

- a) People act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them.
- b) These meanings arise out of social interaction.
- c) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process.
- d) Society is composed of macro-structures and institutions that determine human behavior.

2. According to Blumer, meaning is created and modified through:

- a) Fixed social norms and roles.
- b) biological determinism.
- c) An interpretive process within social interaction.
- d) Pre-existing symbols.

**3. Herbert Blumer is credited with coining the term symbolic interactionism in year**

- 1.1969
- 2.1937
- 3.1951
- 4.1905

**4. Blumer's approach to symbolic interactionism is most closely associated with which of the following.**

- a) purely psychological perspective.
- b) An emphasis on large-scale social structures.
- c) The interpretive process and active construction of meaning.
- d)The concept of the "looking-glass self" as developed by C.H Cooley.

**5.What is the role of individual actor in Blumer’s framework.**

- a) Individuals are passive recipients of societal norms.
- b) Individuals are determined solely by macro-level forces.
- c) Individuals actively define and interpret their own social reality.
- d) Individuals primarily follow pre-existing roles and scripts.

**Answers: 1-d, 2-c, 3-b, 4-c, 5-c**

**13.10 Suggested Readings**

- 1. H. Blumer (1969), *Interactionism, Perspective and Method*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall.
- 2. H. Blumer (1962), “Society and Symbolic Interaction, in *Human Behaviour and Social*

*Process*, ed. Arnold M. Rose, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

3. Abraham, M. Francis (1982), *Modern Sociological Theory: An Introduction*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. Kinloch, Graham .C (1977), *Sociological Theory: Its Development and Major Paradigms*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
5. Charon, Joel. M. (1979), *Symbolic Interactionism*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice- Hall.
6. Zeitlin, Irving M. (1987) *Rethinking Sociology: A Critique of Contemporary Theory*, Jaipur” Rawat Publications.

### **13.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answers: 1-b, 2-false, 3-c**