Unit 21
Civil Society and Democracy

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have read this unity you will be able to

- explain what is civil society

- outline the relationship between civil society and democracy

- democractise of danger of civil society

21.1   Introduction

In the recent years the concept like 'civil society' and concern for democracy has gained much of the space in academic discussions, debates and writings around the world. In the world of ideas, civil society is hot. It is almost impossible to read an article on foreign or domestic policy without coming across some mention of the concept. Though the terminology 'civil society' and 'democracy' is as old as the social science is yet they have undergone radical change in its meaning and essence. For our understanding of the concepts, it would be desirable to have a look at the historical perspectives of these concepts, where different intellectuals have placed their thoughts in these directions.

21.2   Civil Society: A Retrospection

The rise in popularity of civil society was largely due to the struggles against tyranny waged by resistance groups in Latin America, Africa and the former communist world. The period of 1980s and 1990s witnessed the advent of a global democratic revolution of unprecedented proportions, unions, women's organisations, student groups and other forms of popular activism provided the resurgent and often rebellious civil societies in triggering the demise of many forms of dictatorship. These developments encouraged the rise of the complex notion that if an invigorated civil society could force a democratic transition, it could consolidate democracy as well.

The term 'civil society' can be traced through the works of Cicero and other Romans to the ancient Greek philosophers. In its classical usage civil society was largely equated with the state. The modern idea of civil society found expression in the Scottish and Continental Enlightenment of the late 18th

century. Here a range of political philosophers, from Thomas Paine to George Hegel, developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to but separate from the state where citizens associate according to their own interests and wishes. Hegel's nineteenth-century notion of civil society included the market in contrast to contemporary concepts of civil society as a non-profit sector. This new definition reflected changing economic realities: the rise of private property, market competition and the bourgeoisie. It also resulted in the mounting popular demand for liberty, as manifested in the American English and French revolutions.

The term, however, lost its concurrence in the mid-19th century as political philosophers and sociologists turned their attention to the social and political consequences of the industrial revolution. It bounced back into fashion after World War II through the writings of the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci who revived the term to portray civil society as a special nucleus of independent political activity, a crucial sphere of struggle against tyranny. Although Gramsci was concerned about dictatorships of the right, his books were influential in the 1970s and 1980s amongst persons fighting against dictatorships of all political stripes in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Czech, Hungarian, and Polish activists also wrapped themselves in the banner of civil society, endowing it with a heroic quality when the Berlin Wall fell.

Understanding the importance of the given concept, recently David Held tried to give shape to the concept of 'civil society' through a sociological definition. In his words, "Civil society retains a distinctive character to the extent that it is made up of areas of social life—the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interaction—which are organised by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the direct control of the state."

Suddenly, in the 1990s, civil society became a mantra for everyone from presidents to political scientists. The global trend toward democracy opened up space for civil society in formerly dictatorial countries around the world. In the United States and Western Europe, public fatigue with tired party systems sparked interest in civil society as a means of social renewal. Especially in the developing world, privatisation and other market reforms offered civil society the chance to step in as governments retracted their reach. And the information revolution provided new tools for forging connections and empowering citizens. Civil society became a key element of the post-cold-war zeitgeist.

21.3 Democracy: A Universal Appeal

Like 'civil society', 'democracy' has also been a fluid concept across the times and places. Sharp contrast could be visualised between ancient Athenian democracy and modern liberal democracy, representative democracy and deliberative democracy, national democracy and cosmopolitan democracy.

Yet a common theme runs through all these conceptions of democracy that it is a condition where a community of people exercises collective self-determination. Through democracy, members of a given public demos take decisions that shape their destiny jointly, with equal rights and opportunities of participation and without arbitrarily imposed constraints on debate. Given the paucity of space it would be sufficient to say that democracy is essentially participatory, consultative, transparent and publicly accountable. By one

mechanism or another, democratic governance rests on the consent of the governed.

Emphasis added, democracy is constructed in relation to context and should be reconstructed when that context changes. Contemporary globalisation constitutes the sort of change of situation that requires new approaches to democracy.

According to Schmitter and Karl, for purposes of clarity and consistency, modern political democracy is defined as "a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the cooperation of their elected representatives"

Before, we attempt to make analysis of the relationship between civil society and democracy, how far they could be complementary in promoting each other, it would be imperative to have a view of the over-arching concept of civil society.

21.4   The Scope of Civil Society

The much of the current enthusiasm about civil society is its fascination with non-governmental organisations, especially advocacy groups devoted to public interest and causes and its concern for environment human rights, women's issues, rights of the disabled, election monitoring, anticorruption, etc. Such groups have been on the increase in recent years, particularly in the countries under influence of democratic transitions. However, it would be a misconception to equate civil society with mere NGOs. Whereas civil society is a much broader concept, encompassing all the organisations and associations that exist outside the state including political parties and the market oriented organisations, it includes the plethora of organisations that political scientists traditionally label— interest groups or pressure groups. Apart from NGOs, labour unions, professional associations (such as those of doctors and lawyers), chambers of commerce, ethnic associations and others. The list is all comprehensive; it also incorporates many other associations that exist for purposes other than advancing specific social or political agendas, such as religious organisations, student groups, cultural organisations, sports clubs and informal community groups.

Emphasise added, non-governmental organisations do play important role in developed and developing countries. They help in formulating policy by exerting pressure on governments and by furnishing technical expertise to policy makers. They induce citizen participation and civic education. They provide leadership training to young people who want to engage in civic life but are apathetic towards political parties. In theocratic and dictatorial countries NGOs are outweighed by more traditional parts of civil society. Religious organisations, cultural organisations and other groups often have a mass base in the population and secure domestic sources of funding. Here, advocacy groups usually lack domestic funding.

The burgeoning NGO sectors in such countries are often dominated by elite-run groups that have only weak ties with the citizens and for their functioning they largely depend on international funders for budgets they cannot nourish from domestic sources.

Apart from these positive contours of civil society formation, it is worth

pointing out that the mafia and militia groups are also as much as part of the civil society as the other humane organisations are. Some civil society enthusiasts have propagated the one sided notion that civil society consists only of noble causes and welfare action-oriented programmes. Yet civil society everywhere is a mixture of the good, the bad, and the outright bizarre. A random surfing through web pages on the Internet helps convey a sense of that diversity where one gets through the real scope of civil society.

If one limits civil society to those actors who pursue higher humane aims, the concept becomes, 'a theological notion, not a political or sociological one', which could injure the notion of society itself.

21.5   Relationship between Civil Society and Democracy

It is emphasised here that in certain conditions civil society can contribute to the democratisation of authoritarian regimes and can help to sustain a democratic system of governance once it is established. For example, in the Eastern European countries, South Africa, Serbia, Philippines, and recently in Georgia, citizens have used civil society organisations to wage struggle for political independence by learning about democracy and by mobilising millions of their fellow citizens against repressive regimes.

In democratic setup, civil society organisations provide basis for citizens to pursue common interests in political, social, or spiritual domain; here they participate freely, collectively and peacefully. By their involvement in civil society, citizens learn about fundamental democratic values of participation and collective action and they further disseminate these values within their communities. Civil society movements that represent citizen interests can considerably influence both government policy and social attitudes. Independent activities of the civil society can pause a counterweight to state power.

Box 21.1: People's Power

The idea of civil society is largely associated in many Westerners' minds with 'people power' movements to oust dictators. The successful Western democracy, programs to strengthen civil society in different parts of the world have become a standard agenda for U.S. and European countries. It is also known as the 'democracy promotion tool kit'. Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway provide two interesting contributions to the discussion on the potential collaborative role of the international community and civil society in consolidating democracy. "Aiding Democracy Abroad" is one of the most comprehensive and important published work on current practices in U.S. democracy promotion. Carothers without going into the international relations debate over whether democracy promotion as a strategy, corresponds to realist security interests or idealist, humanitarian motivations. He claims that it is the blend of the two.

To substantiate his view point in a systematic manner, he discusses three central aspects of democracy aid: electoral assistance, institutional reform, and civil society assistance. He does this by elaborating on four case studies of countries on the receiving end of various types of U.S. democracy assistance: Guatemala, Nepal, Zambia, and Romania.

Democracy aid, in Carothers's view, is the byproduct of democratisation, not the vise-versa. The political space created by democratising regimes has made it possible for international assistance to pursue democracy promotion in these countries. In his conclusive observation, he remarks that despite variations in local context, U.S. democracy promotion activities follow a 'one size fits all' democratic template, which is not a healthy promotion scheme. This template of aiding democracy, he propounds, has developed in the course of practice rather than by conscious application of academic theories.

The strengthening of civil society in different parts of the world is frequently offered as the answer to the questions pervasive in Washington, How can the Arab world democratise? And what should the United States do to help democracy there?

Though one can not concur U.S. interference in the internal affairs of any other country yet there is strong consensus among scholars that civil society is uppermost to the incarnation of democracy. John Keane expresses this view when he notes that "where there is no civil society there cannot be citizens with capabilities to choose their identities, entitlements and duties within a political-legal framework."

21.6   Functions of Civil Society in a Democratic Order

Throwing light about the functions of a civil society in promoting democratic polity, Larry Diamond in his article, '*Rethinking Civil Society*'(1996), says, "Civil society plays a significant role in building and consolidating democracy." He opines: "The democratic civil society…the more likely it is that democracy will emerge and endure". In Diamond's view, civil society performs following important functions:

1) To limit state power—By checking its political abuses and violations of the law and subjecting them to public scrutiny. Diamond maintains, "a vibrant civil society is probably more essential for consolidating and maintaining democracy than initiating it."

2) To empower citizens by "increasing the political efficacy and skill of the democratic citizen and promoting an appreciation of the obligations as well as rights of democratic citizenship."

3) To inculcate and promote an arena for the development of democratic attributes amongst the citizens—Such as tolerance, moderation, a willingness to compromise and respect for opposing viewpoints." According to Diamond, this is an important function as it allows "traditionally excluded groups—such as women and racial or ethnic minorities—access to power that has been denied them in the 'upper echelons' of formal politics."

4) To provide avenues for political parties and other organisations allowing them to articulate, aggregate, and represent their interests- This enhances the quality of democracy as "it generates opportunities for participation and influence at all levels of governance, not the least the local government."

5) To function as a recruiting, informational and leadership generating agency especially in economically developed societies—Where, Economic reform is sometimes necessary, but often difficult to bring about if it threatens vested economic interests. the massive economic collapse in Indonesia

unleashed mass discontent and made President Suharto suddenly vulnerable. This transformed the environment to allow civil society groups and opposition parties to mobilize citizens in an unprecedented fashion.

6) A well founded civil society could act as a shock observing institution, where wide range of interests that may cross-cut and mitigate the principal polarities of political conflict.

7) To generate public and political support for successful economic and political reforms—which require the support of coalitions in society and the legislature.

8) A well-rooted civil society also helps in identifying and train new political leaders—As such, it can "play a crucial role in revitalising...the narrow and stagnant" party dominated leadership recruitment patterns.

9) Election monitoring— Many non-partisan organisations engage in election monitoring at home and abroad. Such efforts, says Diamond, "have been critical in detecting fraud, enhancing voter confidence, affirming the legitimacy of the result, or demonstrating an opposition victory despite government fraud." The Philippines in the mid 1980s and Panama in 1989 6 are cited as examples.

a) Strengthening citizen attitudes toward the state— Civil society enhances "the accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, effectiveness, and hence legitimacy of the political system." In so doing it gives citizens respect for the state and positive involvement in it. Here, civil society is crucial to the development and maintenance of stable, quality sensitive democracy.

10) In addition to this, other scholars have also come out with their view point on the subject. Borrowing from Robert Dahl's classic work on democracy, Alfred Stepan in his work, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (1996), states that among the basic requirements for democracy "is the opportunity to formulate preferences, to signify preferences, and to have these preferences weighted adequately in the conduct of government." According to Robert Dahl for the proper functioning of the government, it should ensure the following institutional guarantees which include:

1) freedom of association and expression;

2) the right to vote;

3) run for public office;

4) free and fair elections;

5) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes;

6) alternative sources of information;

7) policy making institutions dependent on votes;

8) Other expressions of preference.

Box 21.2: Fundamental Liberties

However, while accepting the importance of these institutional guarantees, Stepan considers them as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the functioning of democracy. Not sufficient, 'because no matter how free and fair the elections, and no matter how large the majority of the government, the political society' lacks quality unless it is able to produce a constitution that provides for fundamental liberties, minority rights, and a set of institutions and checks and balances that limit state power and ensure accountability, necessary for any given democratic system.

21.7 Civil Society as a Promoter of Democracy

In an article, '**Civil Society and Democracy in Global Governance**', Dr. Jan Aart Scholte Makes a comprehensive analysis of the concepts. She not only visualises positive aspects of the relationship between civil society and democracy, but also evaluates the unenthusiastic side of it too.

Taking a positive note of the civil society as promoter of democratic form of governance, Scholte identifies six areas where civil society could advance democracy.

1) *Public education*—Awareness is key to any democratic system. The civil society might enhance democracy through educating the public. An informed citizenry could sustain effective democracy, civic associations can contribute a lot by raising public awareness and understanding of world wide existing laws and regulatory institutions. To accomplish this goal civil, society groups can prepare handbooks and information kits, produce audio-visual presentations, organize workshops, circulate newsletters, supply information to and attract the attention of the mass media, maintain websites on the Internet, and develop curricular materials for schools and institutions of higher education.

2) *Voice to stakeholders*—Civil society could promote democratic governance by giving voice to stakeholders. Civic associations can opportune the concerned parties to relay information, testimonial, and analysis to governance agencies about their needs and demands. Civil society organisations can give voice to neglected social circles like the poor, women and persons with disability who tend to get a limited hearing through other channels including their elected representatives in executive and legislative bodies. In this way civic activism could empower stakeholders and mould politics toward greater participatory democracy.

3) *Policy inputs*—Government policy formulation is considerably influenced from the Inputs given by the civil society not only at home but also in the international arena. For example, civic groups have been pioneer in sparking debate about the so-called 'Washington Consensus'. They have also constantly raised issues pertaining to ecological imbalances, made qualitative assessments of poverty, and pressurised for the schemes of debt reduction in the South.

4) *Transparency of governance*—Vigilant civic mobilisation can cause public transparency in governance. Constant pressure from civil society can help in bringing regulatory frameworks and operations into the open, where they could be accessed for public scrutiny. Generally citizens do not have the awareness about what decisions are taken by the government, by whom, from what options, on what grounds, with what expected results, and with what resources to support implementation. Civic groups through their well lit networks can question the currently popular official rhetoric of 'transparency' by asking critical questions about what is made transparent, at what time, in what forms, through what channels, on whose decision, for what purpose, and in whose interest.

Reflection and Action 21.1

What is civil society? What are its functions in a democracy?

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5) *Public accountability*—Civil society can hold various concerned agencies accountable to public. Civic groups can keep an eye on the implementation

and effects of policies regarding people and press for corrective measures when the consequences are adverse. For example, independent civic agencies have impartial policy evaluation mechanisms for the World Bank and the IMF. Whereby, they have more often criticised their policies towards the Less Developed Countries. The Western countries, which claim to be democratic in the behaviour, often while as a part of global player some times become far more dictatorial than those whom they criticize and put sanctions against them. Here, the civic agencies through an accountability function can push authorities in global governance to take greater responsibility for their actions and policies.

6) *Legitimacy*—The sum total of the preceding actions by the civil society could lead to a legitimate democratic rule. Legitimate rule prevails when people concede that an authority has a right to govern and that they have a duty to obey its directives. As a result of such consent, legitimate governance tends to be more easily, productively and nonviolently executed than illegitimate and dictatorial authority.

Here, it is important to understand that democracy should not be understood only in terms of national governance. The civil society should have a larger agenda of democracy as a policy of global governance. The civil society not only could promote democracy at home, their impact could be clearly seen in the democratisation of global order. Civil society can offer a means for citizens to affirm that global governance arrangements should guide and where necessary, constrain their behaviour.

Apart from this, the international concerns for human rights, women rights, rights of the disabled and concerns for environment have great impact on the domestic policy formulation and its implementation too. For example, various development related NGOs and think-tank,s who lobby for global debt relief and socially sustainable structural adjustment, have gone on to scrutinize public finances in national and local governments. In addition to this, women's movements have often used international laws and institutions in their favour to democratise the state on gender lines. The rights of the persons with disability also get impetus from international concerns for human rights.

21.8 The Democratic Dangers of Civil Society

Civil society's contribution to democracy in domestic as well as global governance is well placed in context. But here it must be noted that civil society might in certain ways actually detract from democratic governance of international relations. In these situations it is not that civic activities fail to realise their democratising potential but that they, in fact, obstruct popular rule. Seven general negative possibilities can be identified.

1) *Civil society activities may not essentially pursue democratic purposes.* Though the term *civil* society at the outset seems to convey elements of civility and virtue, but in practice, voluntary associations do not ipso facto have the promotion of democracy on their agenda. On the contrary, elements of such organisations may engage themselves in subverting democracy. For example, some civic organisations can work to promote their private petty interests and privileges. The destructive groups engaged in promoting racism, ultra-nationalism and religious fundamentalism work contrary to the democratic rights of others. Those parts of the Islamic sector that are politically relevant, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have not pushed for democracy in a comprehensive fashion.

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2) *Civil society might draw away from democracy if its efforts are poorly planned and designed or executed*—if the said activists function without understanding the institutional arrangement of governance, they could cause real harm to the very objectives of their organisation. Even academicians may fail to link their theoretical models of universal application of democracy to empirical evidence and political exigencies of that particular area.

3) *Ill-equipped government agencies can not handle civil society inputs*—Regulatory bodies may lack relevant staff expertise, adequate funds, suitable procedures or the necessary receptive attitudes to take advantage of the benefits on offer from civil society. Government officials may consult civic associations only in the later stages of policymaking when the key decisions have already been taken. Instead of promoting democracy this could lead to friction in the society and cause turmoil.

4) *The state funding and benefits could corrupt the volunteers of the civic organisations.*—Instead of focusing on there aims and objectives they could run in short term gains.

5) *Inadequate representation could seriously undermine the very fabric of democracy*—If civil society has to realise its promises fully, then all stratas of civil society should be duly allowed to access authorities and more over equality of opportunity in terms of participation otherwise civil society can reproduce or even enlarge structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges connected with class, gender, nationality, race, religion, urban versus rural location and so on.

6) *Civil society concern for global democracy could be insensitive towards the local cultural practices.*—Here, civil society may not respond to all of the contexts of local population. In particular there is a danger that civil society in the South and the former communist-ruled countries could come under the strong influence of western-styled, western-funded NGOs led by the westernized. Such campaigners might criticize prevailing conditions of global governance; they have stronger cultural affinities with global managers than with local communities. Thus NGOs and other professionalised civil society bodies may perhaps quite unintentionally marginalise grassroot circles that could give better voice to the diverse life-worlds that global governance affects.

7) *Civil society may lack internal democracy.*—Civil society groups -including those that specifically campaign for greater democracy, can fall short of democratic behaviour in their own functioning. A lack of internal democracy within civil society circles is not only objectionable in itself, but also contradicts its very goal of bringing democracy to society at large. It is an often realised situation, where civic associations offer their members little opportunity for participation beyond the payment of subscriptions. Civil society organisations may advocate on behalf of certain constituencies without adequately consulting them. The leadership of a civic organisation may suppress debate in the name of welfare. Civic groups may lack transparency as some times they do not publish financial statements or declarations of objectives of their organisation, let alone full-scale reports of their activities.

Given these potential problems, we should balance our enthusiasm for civil society as promoting agency for democracy in domestic as well as international arena with due caution and care. One should not be swayed by much of the

alluring fantasies with civil society. Much can go right but much can also go wrong. Civil society can be a means to good ends, but it is not the end itself. There are circumstances where civic involvement may detract from democracy or sabotage the very fabric of democracy. It should be the first demand of the society that civic associations should not merely assert but also demonstrate their democratic legitimacy.

Reflection and Action 21.2

What is the relationship between civil society and democracy?

In addition to this it should be clearly inferred that those who propagate or fund the very institution of democracy abroad are themselves democratic in their behaviour. U.S. has aided several pro-democracy organisations in the Middle-East since 1991. Majority of democracy aid for the Middle East from 1991 to 2001 had been around about $150 million. The projects were classified as 'civil society strengthening.' In West Bank and Gaza the United States had funded some Palestinian NGOs during the Israeli occupation—after the Palestinian Authority was created in 1994. The United States expanded this aid and categorized much of it as civil society strengthening. In 2000, US Aid programme launched a $32 million project to support Palestinian NGOs (mostly service NGOs). In Lebanon, U.S. Aid Programme spent several million dollars to assist community-based service NGOs during the 1990s.

'Aiding civil society' was the leading element of U.S. efforts. Promoting democracy was not the only rationale for these projects. In Egypt, the United States believed that giving private groups an expanded role in development would advance its larger policy goal of economic liberalisation. In the West Bank and Gaza, the United States hoped to generate popular support for the Oslo peace process by helping Palestinian NGOs improve living conditions under self-rule. (In addition, NGOs were a key instrument for channeling aid, because Congress had imposed a ban on direct U.S. funding of the Palestinian Authority.)

In Lebanon, the United States wanted to help local communities rebuilt in the aftermath of civil war. As government agencies were very weak, community-based organisations and NGOs were better aid partners. During the Clinton administration, political Islam became a factor, though not one that was openly acknowledged. Some U.S. officials saw service NGOs as a potential counterweight to the Islamic charities and other groups that were a major source of grassroots' support for Islamist opposition movements and these officials wanted to direct resources to such groups for this reason. However, when in 1991 and 2003 America attacked small countries Iraq and Afghanistan, United States's commitment for global democracy by undemocratic means could be easily inferred. America's liking for democracy is not new, nearly two-dozen military invasions launched in the name of democracy throughout Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean by American presidents (most notably Wilson, president from 1913–21) did not produce a single viable democracy. More instructive still are the most recent instances in which the United States has forcibly removed dictatorial regimes with the implicit promise of creating democracy—Panama in 1992, Haiti in 1994 and Afghanistan in 2002. None of these experiences can be held up as examples of successful democratisation.

21.9 Conclusion

After having done an in-depth study of the civil society in relation to functional and promotional aspect of democracy both at national and international level, we come across a jumbled up situation that those who always propagate democracy as the best and universal system of governance themselves detract from the same while coming to their own interests, even some times petty interests. Still there cannot be two points on the issue that civil society has largely helped to give convenient path to the functioning of democracy. But the general perception that less developed World should accept is that Western Model of civil society and democracy is equally dangerous and self imposing.

There is so much of academic assertion on this point that some anthropologists even question whether the concept of civil society even applies outside the West. In a comparative study of China and Taiwan, for example, Robert P. Weller writes, "I have studiously avoided the term 'civil society' while writing about many of its core issues. The term 'civil society' comes with a set of problematic theoretical assumptions and historical connotations, which have strong roots in a particular European philosophical tradition." Political theorists Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani offer a more explanatory reason for the advent of the concept of civil society: "With the arrival of European colonialism, the state became an undeniable, unavoidable part of the business of social living; and the institutional organisation of the modern state invites a discourse in terms of a state/civil society distinction." However, they largely tried to unfold the debate regarding the advent of civil society and State in the colonial context.

To further evaluate the subject in more theoretical context, the following points could be of use for understanding the existing complexities in the subject.

Firstly, advocates often depict civil society as wholly positive, even flawless. For example, in an article, 'Civil Society and Building Democracy: Lessons from International Donor Experience' Harry Blair says that civil society organisations increase citizens' participation in the policy-making process, enhance the state's accountability to its citizenry, and provide civic education in democratic politics. This describes an ideal—an ideal that since 1989 has helped motivate hundreds of millions of dollars in international grants to civil society organisations in less-developed countries, with mixed results.

Secondly, those who idealise civil society often talk about citizen engagement without mentioning citizen conflict. Yet conflict over resources, laws, policies, influence is central and inherent to the plurality of interests is at the heart of civil society. For this reason, fundamentalist societies that believe in a single source of truth, such as the Soviet Union under Stalin and other communist countries in the latter part of 20th century or Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, are much less tolerant of civil society than societies that welcome plural points of view.

Third, from Tocqueville onward, Westerners have generally placed individualism at the heart of civil society. Ernest Gellner, for example, describes the building block of civil society as 'modular man,' an individual who is autonomous yet willing and able to associate. In much of the world, however, individuals do not consider themselves modular. They regard their identities as members of

particular communities (determined by family, religion, ethnicity, caste, race, or something else) as fundamental, not choices easily made and unmade. For example, in Sakété Center, Muslims, Christians, and worshippers of local gods live together and Muslims and Christians often sacrifice to local gods when facing particularly vexing problems. Yet this openness to different practices does not mean that individuals are modular and can easily exchange one faith for another. Religion, like family and ethnicity, embeds the individual in a web of social connections and cultural meanings that can be severed only at significant cost. The basic thesis of civil society rests with the presumption that man being social is challenged. If individuals are considered modular, how do we fashion a definition of civil society that works trans-nationally?

Fourthly, the concept of civil society is placed with too broad parameters. Some have argued that civil society consists of all forms of non-state organisation other than the family which is unacceptable proposition because it includes within civil society many social forms that are essentially private, and thereby fails to distinguish civil society from society at large. To make the concept more useful for the purpose, 'civil' aspect of civil society must limit the category to those networks, movements and organisations that have a public dimension.

Fifthly, here it is stressed that civil society is essentially two-fold in nature: private in origins but public in focus. Civil society groups represent private interests by employing more often non-violent public means, such as association, education and demonstration to influence policy and polity, whether at the neighborhood, city, regional, state, or national level. The interests pursued can be individualistic, or they can be oriented toward religion, race, or other social groupings. In a way that might generate pressure on government.

To conclude our discussion on civil society with positive academic note the essential idea that has been put into practice is that democracy requires a healthy and active civil society. The international community, by providing resources and training to different civic groups, can help to build up domestic civil society in democratising countries. However, at the same time caution should be duly taken in imposing one's ideas and culture in the name of civil society or as a matter of fact democracy. Though democracy is one of the healthiest systems of governance both in domestic and international arena yet there is no final word in social sciences. There are so many ancient cultural systems and practices in the East which are far better than the existing western way of life. They should not be discarded merely because we have fantasies and and fondness for the West. More importantly, the debate and enthusiasm for promoting better life style should continue in order to benefit the people who are living in authoritarian societies with abysmal poverty and sufferings.

21.10 Further Reading

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Unit 22
Conceptualising Ethnicity

Contents

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to,

▢ describe class and ethnicity

▢ indicate the construction of ethnicity

▢ outline the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist models of ethnicity

▢ explain the relationship between race and ethnicity

22.1   Introduction

Being different is a construct that we have all somehow somewhere internalised. We learn to be different as we are constantly told in the initial stages of our primary socialisation that it is natural to be segregated. Constant reckoning that boys are boys and girls are girls instill an element of gender segregation and awareness of 'self' in terms of notions of 'us' versus 'them'. As one moves through various life cycle processes –construction of categories of 'us' in contrast to 'them' acquires different contours. Cultural contents are added to these reconstructions of 'us' versus 'them'. These reconstructions also often acquire prejudices and voluntary affirmation of stereotypes. It is recognition of these repetitive behavioral patterns and emergent consequences that is instrumental in sociological conceptualisation of notions of 'ethnicity'.

Ethnicity is derived from the ancient Greek word *ethnos,* which refers to 'a range of situations where there is a sense of collectivity of humans that live and act together' (Cf. Ostergard, 1992). The notion is often translated today as 'people' or 'nation' (Jenkins, 1997:9). Its use in contemporary sociology and in popular conception is relatively recent. The term was popularised in common American usage with the publication of *Yankee city series* published in 1941. *The Social Life of a Modern City* (1941) and *The Status System of a Modern Community* (1942), two important books written by W.Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt that brought into focus various paradoxes and ambiguities inherent in the concept. Warner was looking for a noun 'to parallel the categories of age, sex, religion and class' (Sollors, 1981), when he came

across the Greek noun *ethnos* used to refer to nation, people and 'others'. Warner used the term ethnicity as a 'trait' that separates the individuals from some classes and identifies him with others' (ibid, 1981). Located in the context of America and numerous studies that followed search of American Identity in the post world war-II America, ethnicity became a search for American Identity versus 'minority identities' or 'immigrant identities'. Demonstrating this trend Philip Gleason wrote in his essay entitled 'Americans All: Ethnicity, Ideology, and American Identity in the Era of World War II' in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (1980):

As a part of the broader American studies movement that grew up in the postwar years — ethnic was conceptualised as a *prototypically American figure, not because of any distinctiveness of cultural heritage, but for exactly the opposite reason, because ethnic exhibited in an extreme degree the "character structure" produced by the American experience of change, mobility and loss of contact with the past'* — a statement that was beautiful chronicled years before Gleason's analysis came to the fore, by Oscar Handlin (1951) in the introduction to his fascinating work *The uprooted*, whereby he wrote that 'once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history'.

Whatever may be the limitations of innumerous studies on 'ethnicity', one common denominator that stands out is that ethnicity studies are conducted in relation to 'others' and focus on the external, (involuntary, objective) and internal (voluntary, subjective). Ethnicity in sociological literature is often construed in relation to concepts like 'class' and 'modernity'.

22.2   Class and Ethnicty

The concept of class rooted in Marxian dictum of hierarchies and precepts of social stratification also encompasses within its scope notions of 'class consciousness'— an idea that talks about building in-group solidarity. Ethnicity as a social construct has also evolved on perceptions of 'bonding' and 'collectivity'. Class theorists use 'exploitation' by the 'others' as an instrument for strengthening 'class solidarity'. In a similar vein those subscribing to constructs of ethnicity focus upon 'common experiences' to develop a sense of 'ethnic consciousness'. Irrespective of these common features many in sociological and social sciences would argue that *ethnicity is not class.* However, at the same time none of them would deny the crucial relationship that ethnicity has with class. Daniel Bell (1975) in his acclaimed essay on 'Ethnicity and Social change' argues:

The reduction of class sentiment is one of the factors one associates with the rise of ethnic identification. He further submits that ethnicity *has become more salient because it can combine interest with an effective tie. Ethnicity provides a tangible set of common identifications—in language, food, music, names—when other social roles become more abstract and impersonal.*

Glazer and Moynihan authors of one of the most popular writings on the subject titled *Beyond the Melting pot* express similar sentiments. They write in their 1975 publication of *Ethnicity: Theory and experience:*

As against class-based forms of social identification and conflict-which of course continue to exist—we have been surprised by the persistence and salience of ethnic based forms of social identification and conflict. *In a*

*perceptive statement elsewhere (*Atlantic Monthly*, August 1968) they argue* our contemporary preoccupation with 'issues such as capitalism, socialism, and communism' keeps us from seeing' that the turbulence of these times here and abroad has had far more to do with ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation than with these other issues.

The term 'ethnicity' acquired enormous political implications in particular after the disintegration of erstwhile nation-states like former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and events that followed the bombing of world Trade center in New York on 9/11. The term came in frequent use in anthropological and sociological writings only in early 70s. It is interesting to note that prior to 1970s textbooks in anthropology and sociology hardly ever defined 'ethnicity' (Cohen, 1978:380). There are some references to 'ethnic groups' in the literature pertaining to early decades of the twentieth century.

Box 22.1: Rethinking Ethnicity

Richard Jenkins in his critically acclaimed work titled *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* notes:

Since the early decades of this century, the linked concepts of ethnicity and ethnic group have been taken in many directions, academically (Stone, 1996) *and otherwise. They have passed into everyday discourse, and become central to the politics of group differentiation and advantage, in the culturally diverse social democracies of Europe and North America. With the notions of 'race' in public and scientific disrepute since 1945, ethnicity has obligingly stepped into the gap, becoming a rallying cry in the bloody often reorganisation of the post-cold-war world. The obscenity of 'ethnic cleansing' stands shoulder to shoulder with earlier euphemism such as 'racial hygiene' and 'the final solution'* (1997:9).

Two things emerge in Jenkins interesting interpretation of 'ethnicity'. First suggests that notions of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' travel together. If ethnicity emerged as a key sociological and political concept only in the early 70s it was in operation as a sociological reality much before that and was commonly addressed in solidarities and differences that marked social and cultural groups. The second point that is highlighted in the excerpt is that the nomenclature 'ethnic group' appeared as a natural and neutral option to the much beleaguered and abused notion of race. Jenkins also refers to advantages that accrue because of ethnic affiliations. Sometimes these advantages are granted to groups because they are perceived to be marginal to the other groups in the societies. You are probably familiar with the notion of *protective discrimination* or *reservations, which* is addressed as *affirmative action* in favour of racially under-privileged groups in North America. It is important to understand here that 'being part of an ethnic group' provides a sense of belonging and an assertion of 'identity'. This sense of belonging and identity also accompany certain advantages and disadvantages. We will discuss some of these issues in the following lessons on 'construction of identity' and 'boundary and boundary maintenance'. In this lesson, we will essentially focus on 'conceptualising ethnicity'—its historical roots and various theories propounded by various scholars for its sustenance.

22.3   Construction of Ethnicity

Some contributors to the theory of ethnicity trace back its origins to the early works of Max Weber. Weber in one of his important contributions namely *Economy and Society* first published in 1922 and reprinted in 1968 regards an ethnic group to be a group whose members share a belief that they have a common ancestor or to put it differently 'they are of common descent'. He qualifies his statement by suggesting that:

Ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity (1968:389).

It is apparent from Weber's statement that biology had little role to play in cultivating 'sense of belonging'. Weber perceived Ethnic group as a **status group**. A status group may be rooted in perceptions of shared religion, language or culture. Members of the group on the basis of **shared communality** tend to form 'monopolistic social closure'—that is they refuse to let others enter their exclusive domain. Every member of the group knows what is expected of him in situations of collective participation. They also function together to protect each other's honour and dignity. It is on these perceptions that 'suicide squads' operate in political struggles. Weber also argues that 'since the possibilities for collective action rooted in ethnicity are 'indefinite', the *ethnic group*, and its close relative *nation,* cannot easily be precisely defined for sociological purposes'. (for details refer to Jenkins, 1997:10). This profound statement by Weber enables us to understand how political acts of subversion under one regime are celebrated as heroic and patriotic by those who are seeking political sovereignty; and are condemned as acts of treason by those governing the nation states. You must be reading articles in Newspapers about ongoing struggle between Israel and Palestine and various other so called insurgent groups and the nation states. Ethnicity forms complex equations and simple cultural or ethnological explanations are not enough to unfold its mysteries.

Ethnicity as a theoretical tool for understanding complex questions of social interaction and political formations holds equal interest not only for sociologists but also for anthropologists and political scientists. In a broad sense, three approaches to the understanding of ethnicity can be considered, namely *Primordialist, Instrumentalist and constructivist.*

22.4   Primordialist Approach

The primordialist approach recognises biology as the fundamental for establishing ethnic identity. The biological roots are determined by genetic and geographical factors. These linkages result in the formation of close-knit kin- groups. Kinship loyalties demand that near relatives are favored by those in situations of command and controlling resources. In contemporary terminology such favours are rebuked for being *nepotistic. **Nepotism*** is defined as the 'tendency to favour kin over non-kin'. This principle of kin-selection based on conceptions of socio-biology is not acceptable in societies that claim to be democratic and follow principles of meritocracy. **Pierre Van den Berghe** explains that:

In general ethnicity is defined as a comprehensive form of natural selection

and kinship connections, a primordial instinctive impulse. Which continues to be present even in the most industrialised mass societies of today.(1981:35)

Socio-biological interpretations of ethnicity assume that there are tangible explanations for ethnicity. Some of the followers of this school are convinced that genetic linkages by itself are responsible for accentuating ethnic ties. Another group within the same school thinks that biological and kinship ties evolve and are furthered by cultural influences. The explanations offered by various scholars suggest that this school of though is primarily rooted in evolutionary construction of human societies. Shaw and Wong(1989) argue that 'recognition of group affiliation is genetically encoded, being a product of early human evolution, when the ability to recognise the members of one's family group was necessary for survival'.

Box 22.2: Concept of Ethnos

There are frequent references and endorsement of primordialist position in Russian and Soviet anthropology. The concept of *Ethnos* in the works of Russian scholars that was later developed by **Y.U. Bromley**(1974) among others defines it as:

Ethnos as a 'group of people, speaking one and the same language and admitting common origin, characterised by a set of customs and a life style which are preserved and sanctified by tradition , which distinguishes it from others of the same kind'.

The socio-biological interpretations of ethnicity were critical in developing a framework for the study of *ethno genesis*. According to the theory of ethnogensis '**ethnos** emerged as a consequence of joint effect of cosmic energies and landscape'. The primordial model of studying ethnicity has received diverse reactions. Simple socio-biological explanations of ethnicity that interpret ethnic groups as only 'extended kin-groups' were severely critiqued by some scholars but found support in the writings of scholars such as Clifford Geertz(1973). **Geertz** argued that 'ties of blood, language and culture are seen by actors to be ineffable and obligatory; that they are seen as natural'— as members of society — most of you must have experienced these sentiments yourself.

Important question in the understanding of ethnicity is how are these sentiments rationalised in the context of empirical situations demanding loyalties. Primordialists would argue that kinship bonds and cultural attachments would always reign supreme and govern social and political actions. Geertz extends this argument when he writes:

[the] crystallization of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments -this 'longing not to belong to any other group'-…..gives to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism, communalism, and so on, a more ominous and deeply threatening quality than most of the other, also very serious and intractable, problem the new state face(1973:261).

It is this debate that dominates discussions in the construction of modern day civil society in which equality is considered as the only legitimate principle. Differences in terms of culture, language, religion and origins are accepted and celebrated but perpetuation of any of these primary attributes for establishing separate 'political identities' within any existing nation state

are viewed with disdain. Students of ethnicity are constantly engaged in debating whether 'ethnicity' is primordial or manipulated by individuals with political intents.

22.5   Instrumentalist Approach

Students of ethnicity are constantly asking:

Is ethnicity an aspect of 'human nature'? Or is it, to whatever extent, defined situationallly, strategically or tactically manipulable, and capable of change at both the individual and collective levels? Is it wholly socially constructed? (Jenkins, 1997).

We have already reflected upon the first question and made you familiar with different positions that scholars take on ethnicity being an integral part of human nature. We will now discuss the second question, also discussed as *instrumentalist* approach to ethnicity. The instrumentalist approach became popular in sociological and political science writings in late sixties and early seventy's. Names of **Fredrik Barth and Paul Brass** are commonly associated with popularising instrumentalist position in social science literature. Also sometimes referred to as *Situationalist* perspective it emphasises plasticity in maintaining ethnic group boundaries. It argues that people can change membership and move from one ethnic group to another. The change can take place either because of circumstances or as Paul Brass says because of manipulation by Political elites.   He regarded ethnicity:

As a product of political myths, created and manipulated by cultural elites in their pursuit of advantages and power. The cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups become resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage. They become symbols and referents for the identification of members of group, which are called up in order to ease the creation of political identity *(1985).*

In his two books — **Language**, **Religion and Politics in North India** *(1985),* **Ethnicity and Nationalism***: Theory and Comparison (1991), Brass closely examines issues of ethnicity and Nationalism in the context of India. Brass borrowed De Vos's definition of Ethnicity that viewed ethnicity as consisting of 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use' by a group of people...of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups' and modified it replacing the last phrase to suggest 'in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups'(1991). In this explanation Brass is asserting the importance of symbols and the need for internal cohesion for ethnicity to flourish. When we examine these assertions in empirical context we can understand why political parties constantly keep inventing and reinventing symbols attached to different groups for commanding loyalty in situations of political realignments. Cow slaughter, Muslim Personal law and dwindling importance of Urdu language are some of symbolic issues that are frequently raised in political debates.*

Fredrik Barth on the other hand was always convinced that the focus for the investigation of ethnicity should be 'the ethnic boundary that defines the group' adapting the definition that ethnicity is social organisation of cultural differences. *Barth in his symposium* **Ethnic groups and Boundaries** *(1969) regarded* ascription *and* self-ascription *critical to the process of establishing group boundaries.*

> **Box 22.3: Corporate Model of Ethnic Group**
>
> An ethnic group was biologically self-perpetuating; members of the group shared basic cultural values and these values manifest it-self in overt cultural forms; third the group was a bounded social field of communication and interaction; and fourth its members identified themselves and were identified by others as belonging to that group.

Barth in his critique of the corporate model argued that this elucidation of ethnic group assumed that various groups in the society lived in relative isolation 'as an island in itself'. In his interpretation ethnic groups as ontological collectivities are malleable. He argued that ethnic identity, and its production and reproduction in social interaction is to be treated as 'problematic' feature of social reality. He recommended that the ethnographer must examine the practices and processes whereby ethnicity and ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and perpetuated. To arrive at this understanding Barth asserted that this construction is possible only when we acknowledge that **ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves** *(Barth, 1969). Barth's model of ethnicity highlights the following features:*

Analysis of ethnicity begins by understanding the situation held by social actors e.g. actors are being asked to ascertain their identity in a situation of confrontation or cooperation. The shades that ethnic identity acquires will be essentially determined by this perception.

Second, the focus of attention then becomes the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. If it is a situation of confrontation, ethnicity attains center stage. It expresses itself in far more assertive terms then it would do either in a neutral situation or underplay differences in a situation asking for economic or political cooperation. The structured interaction between 'us' and 'them' across boundary is defined by strategic situation.

> **Reflection and Action 22.1**
>
> Outline the features of Barth's model of ethnicity.

Third and most critical of these criteria are notions of ascription-both by members of the ethnic group in question and those outside the group. Ethnicity acquires political impetus primarily because of this criterion of ascription. In situations where an individual assumes himself to be a member but is not so perceived by others, his own sense of belongingness carries little or no weight at all.

Fourth, ethnicity is not fixed; it is situationally defined. Most interesting example of this is observed in situations of trans-migration, wherein individuals may ascribe themselves to different ethnic groups or attach differential degree of importance to their sense of belonging –in other words either overplay or underplay ethnicity situationally.

Fifth, ecological issues are particularly influential in determining ethnic identity. If economic niches are constrictive and resources limited, it is invariably seen that in such situations ethnicity becomes much more pronounced.

Commenting on Barth's understanding of Ethnicity, Jenkins writes:

Barth emphasises that ethnic identity is generated, confirmed or transformed in the course of interaction and transaction between decision-making, strategising individuals. Ethnicity in **Ethnic group and boundaries** is, perhaps before it is anything else, a matter of politics, decision making and goal orientation...shared culture is, in this model, best understood as generated in and by processes of ethnic boundary maintenance, rather than the other way round: the production and reproduction of difference vis-à-vis external others is what creates the image of similarity internally, vis-à-vis each other.

Sociologists and Social anthropologists have argued that this model of ethnicity is essentially borrowed from the works of Max Weber. Barth facilitated its understanding by differentiating it from notions of race and culture. According to Vermeulen and Grovers (1994:2) 'Barth presented ethnicity or ethnic identity as an aspect of social organisation, not of culture'.

Wallman (1986 et al) *furthered Barth's understanding and argues that:*

Ethnicity is the process by which 'their' difference is used to enhance the sense of 'us' for purposes of organisation or identification…..Because it takes two, ethnicity can only happen at the boundary of 'us', in contact or confrontation or by contrast with 'them'. And as the sense of 'us' changes, so the boundary between 'us' and 'them' shifts. Not only does the boundary shift, but the criteria which mark it change.

This explanation makes it clear that ethnicity is transactional, it is essentially impermanent and in that sense has nothing to do with biological inheritance. It is this feature that distinguishes instrumentalist approach from primoridalist perceptions of ethnicity. Ethnic identity is shifting. It is always two sided. Our being Hindus or Muslims, Gujarati or Telgu is immaterial unless these identities are locked in vis-à-vis situations. The key issue in these interactions is manipulation of 'perceived significant differences in their generation'.

Abner Cohen(1974) while analysing Barth's contributions have differences with his perception of ethnicity. Handelman believes that the 'cultural content of ethnicity is an important aspect of its social organisation: a crude dichotomy between the cultural and social is misleading'. To this he adds that ethnicity is socially organised or incorporated in differing degrees of group-ness,—on which depends its salience and importance of individual experience. Moving from 'the casual to corporate', Handelman distinguishes the ethnic set, ethnic category, the ethnic network, the ethnic association and the ethnic community. *Ethnic identities can, for example, organise everyday life without ethnic groups featuring locally as significant social forms'(cf. Jenkins,1997:20)*

22.6   Constructivist Model of Ethnicity

The constructivist model of ethnicity is located in the **interpretive paradigm** *based on* **postmodernism**. *In this interpretation emphasis has shifted to* **negotiation of multiple subjects over group boundaries and identity.** *Sokolovskii and Tishkov stress that*

In this atmosphere of renewed sensitivity to the dialectics of the objective and subjective in the process of ethnic identity formation and maintenance,

even the negotiable ethnic character of ethnic boundaries stressed by Barth was too reminiscent of his objectivist predecessors tendency to reification. It was argued that terms like 'group', 'boundary' still connote a fixed identity, and Barth's concern with maintenance tends to reify it still more *(Cohen, 1978:386).* The mercurial nature of ethnicity was accounted for when it was defined 'as a set of sociocultural diacritics *[*physical appearance, name language, history, religion, nationality*]* which define a shared identity for members and nonmembers'; a series of nesting dichotomisations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness' *(Cohen, 1978:386-7).*

22.7   Jenkins' Model of Ethnicity

Jenkins has offered 'a basic social anthropological model of ethnicity' which is equally relevant for sociological understanding. The model is summarised as follows:

- ethnicity is about cultural differentiation-although, to retrieate the main theme of **Social Identity** (Jenkins,1996), identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference;

- ethnicity is centrally concerned with culture-shared meaning—but it is also rooted in, and to a considerable extent the outcome of, social interaction;

- ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the culture of which it is a component or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced;

- ethnicity as a social identity is collective and individual, externalised in social interaction and internalised in personal identification (Jenkins,1997:13-14).

Jenkins cautions against 'our tendency to reify culture and ethnicity'. It is essential for us to remember that *ethnicity or culture is not something that people have or they belong* but it is a *complex repertories which people experience, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, within which they construct ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows* (1997:14).

Jenkins is representing modern school of thinkers on 'ethnicity' who assume constructivist position.

The fundamental of the concept defined above 'emphasise social construction and everyday practice, acknowledging change as well as stability, and allowing us to recognise individuality in experience and agency as well as stability, and allowing us to recognise individuality in experience and agency as well as the sharing of culture and collective identification'(Jenkins, 1997:165). This reconstruction of ethnicity holds the view that ethnicity is neither inherited nor completely manipulable –positions that were assumed by instrumentalist and primordialists respectively.

> **Box 22.4: The Plasticity of Ethnicity**
>
> —there are limits to the plasticity of ethnicity, as well as to its fixity and solidity, is the founding premise for the development of an understanding of ethnicity which permits us to appreciate that although it is imagined it is not imaginary; to acknowledge its antiquity as well its modernity. Rethinking demands that we should strike a balanced view of the authenticity of ethnic attachments. Somewhere between irresistible emotion an utter cynicism,

neither blindly primordial nor completely manipulable, ethnicity and its allotropes are principles of collective identification and social organisation in terms of culture and history, similarly and difference, that show little signs of withering away. In itself this is neither a 'good thing' nor a 'bad thing'. It is probably just very human. It is hard to imagine the social world in their absence (Jenkins, 1997).

22.8   Race and Ethnicity

Relationship between race and ethnicity is complex. Genesis of the term race are traced to "Latin words 'generatio','ratio','natio', and 'radix' to Spanish and Castilian 'razza', Italian 'razza', and old French 'haraz' with such diverse meanings as generation, root, nobility of blood, patch of threadbare or defective cloth, taint or contamination, or horse breeding" (Sollors, 1996). The term race has been in popular use much before ethnicity was adapted in popular and academic vocabulary. Race came into scientific academic parlance as a classificatory feature. Physical Anthropologists used physical features to classify what some may describe as 'human types'. However man's lust to conquer his fellow beings and subordinate them resulted in tremendous abuse of these so called classificatory studies that were prompted to facilitate scientific research. Magnus Hirschfeld in 1938 described racial abuse as 'racism'. The genocide that was unleashed in World War II in the name of protection of purity of races made academicians and politicians equally shy of using it in public domain. The concept of ethnic group introduced in the mid fifty's was an acknowledged attempt to provide a neutral system of classifying human groups on the basis of 'cultural differences' rather than distinguishing them on the basis of racial characteristic'. It was argued that the terminology of ethnic group would provide a value neutral construct and avoid prejudiced and stereotypical categorisation of people in hierarchical and discriminatory categories. Many scholars believed in the usefulness of this distinction but others thought there was hardly any merit in this distinction as 'race is only one of the markers through which ethnic differences are validated and ethnic boundary markers established' (Wallman, 1986). Those authors supporting the expediency of making this distinction would argue that 'while "ethnic" social relations are not necessarily hierarchical and conflictual, 'race relations' would certainly appear to be' (Jenkins, 1998:75).

> **Reflection and Action 22.2**
>
> Discuss the relationship between race and ethnicity and bring out the points of comparison.

One may reason that even when race is often constructed and conceived in terms of physical or phenotypical differences, prejudices and stereotypes accompanying this perception are socially articulated and perceived. In this sense, many would argue that 'race' is an allotrope of 'ethnicity'. Jenkins prefers to argue the other way suggesting that 'ethnicity and race are different kinds of concept; they do not actually constitute a true pair. The most that can be said is that, at certain times and in certain places, culturally specific conception of 'race'-or more correctly, of 'racial' differentiation – have featured, sometimes very powerfully, in the repertoire of ethnic boundary-maintaining devices' (ibid: 79). Banton (1967:10) has argued that primary difference between race and ethnic group is that membership in an ethnic group is voluntary whereas membership in a racial group is not' and

this would imply that an ethnic group is all about *inclusion* whereas race is all about *exclusion'*. We are once again returning to the basic categories of 'us' versus 'them' critical to our understanding of ethnicity as well as race; but as perceived by Jenkins would argue ethnicity is about 'group identification' whereas 'race' is about 'social categorisation'.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book, *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986), take the position that opting a maxim incorporating, race within the broader confines of ethnic group will encourage the 'strategy of blaming the victim'. Sollors summing up of these differing positions makes perceptive reading:

Omi and Winant argue, partly on political grounds, that any 'true' sociological concept could also conceivably be put to bad political ends. It is also necessary to believe that scholars who see a family relationship between race and ethnicity are therefore guided by an assimilations it bias. Omi and Winant's last point, however, is well taken. Gordon's maxim that all races are ethnic groups could be misunderstood as inviting a method of regarding all blacks as only one ethnic group, because they are also 'race'. Races may be, and often are, ethnically differentiated (African Americans and Jamaicans in the united states), just as ethnic groups may be racially differentiated (Hispanics-who 'may be of any race'—). Omi and Winant's argument supports the need for a careful examination of the relationships of 'visible' and 'cultural' modes of group's construction in specific cases, but not the assumption that there is an absolute dualism between 'race' and 'ethnicity', and a deep rift between them.

22.9   Conclusion

Pierre L.Van den Berghe is the one who offers systematic interpretations of differences between 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Berghe's much acclaimed work *Race and Racism* written in 1996 suggests that four principal connotations of 'race' make it confusing. At the outset he rejects physical anthropological construction of three or four races arguing that this outdated connotation is no longer 'tenable'. The second connotation of race that he prefers to be used in terms of 'ethnic group' is when we speak of the 'French race' or the 'Jewish race' etc.etc. The third explanation argues race to be a synonym of 'species'. It is only the fourth construction offered by Berghe that he recommends we should use. According to this view:

Race refers to *human groups that define itself and/ or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics.*

It is important for the students to note here that sociological conceptions of race takes specific note of 'visible' and 'physical' as suggested by Gordon or as described by Berghe that of 'innate' and 'immutable' distinctions from those described as 'cultural'. The most discerning contribution made by these scholars is that distinctions whether 'racial' or 'ethnic' are a matter of both 'physical' and 'verbal perceptions'. Qualifying this insight Berghe reasons:

In practice, the distinction between a racial and ethnic group is sometimes blurred by several facts. Cultural traits are often regarded as genetic and inherited (e.g. body odor, which is a function of diet, cosmetics, and other

cultural items); physical appearance can be culturally changed (by scarification, surgery, and cosmetics); and the sensory perception of physical differences is affected by cultural perception of race (e.g. a rich Negro may be seen as lighter than an equally dark poor Negro, as suggested by the Brazilian proverb: 'Money bleaches'). However distinction between race and ethnicity remains analytically useful.

This rhetoric of making distinctions on the basis of 'cultural content' or 'descent' overlooks the fact that matters relating to descent accentuate cultural crux on which cultural differences are constructed and boundaries defined or redefined. Sollors sums up this admirably saying 'it is a matter of a 'tendency', not of absolute distinction. Mary Waters (1990) in her distinguished work *Ethnic options* chronicle it as follows:

Certain ancestries take precedence over others in the societal rules on descent and ancestry reckoning. If one believes one is part English and part German and identifies as German, one is not in danger of being accused of trying to 'pass' as non-English and of being 'redefined' English—But if one were part African and part German, one's self identification as German would be highly suspect and probably not accepted if one 'looked' black according to the prevailing social norms.

Without taking either or positions it is important for us to understand that while constructing 'ethnicity'- 'identification' based either on physical features or cultural similarities becomes the key factor. It is this construction of identity and the sociological process of how processes of identification operate as markers of establishing boundaries that will be discussed in the following lessons.

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Unit 23
Construction of Identities

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you will be able to

▫   describe the search for identity

▫   outline Erikson views on identity construction

▫   explain identity and identification

▫   discuss multiple identifies with reference to national character

23.1   Introduction

Identity is a quest, a vision and internalisation of an attitude. This attitude provides us images of self and of others. It is with this standardised mode of perception that we relate to others. Identity in other words refers to generalisations that one evolves about 'self' and 'others'. It is about distinctions and similarities. The term is complex and is often interpreted differently in varied contexts. Some may also argue that its usage in sociological and anthropological texts is ambiguous. The term came into popular sociological usage in early fifty's. The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968) listed two separate articles on *Identity* titled '**Identity, psychosocial**', and '**Identification political**'. This becomes significant due to the fact that the *Encyclopedia of the social sciences* published in 1930 carried no mention of the term **Identity**.

Erik.H.Erikson (1959), who happened to be a 'psychoanalytic theorist' introduced the term identity and also focused on inherent ambiguities of the term identity? Erikson's contributions in this regard will be discussed in the later part of the lesson but first we will make an attempt to locate the origin of the term and its meaning in social science writings.

Identity is rooted in the Latin word *idem.* This is in common use in the English language since the sixteenth century. Philip Gleason (1983) draws our attention to the technical and philosophical use of the term *Identity:*

Identity has a technical meaning in algebra and logic and has been associated with the perennial mind body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke (cf. Sollors, 1996)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines **Identity** as:

The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness-in social science writings this definition of identity is commonly not adopted because of its focus on inseparable, impregnable homogeneity. It is the second definition quoted as follows that is germane to our understanding of identity and it states:
The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.

23.2   The Search for Identity

Personal Identity in psychology refers to the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality.

Social historians trace the meaning of identity in Oxford dictionary to Locke's essay *Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and David Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*(1739). The evolutionary theory in early anthropological writings talked about *psychic unity of mankind* thereby denying notions of individuality and identity. 'The unity of the self' was also the preponderant perception in Christianity. Locke questioned the perception, when he argued that:

A man's identity …..consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organised body'.

Langbaum has written a treatise documenting how writers and poets of the ilk of D.H. Lawrence and William Wordsworth took up the challenge posed by Locke to the notion of 'unity of the self'. The review also documents the seriousness with which questions of identity in relation to personality and sense of individuality were taken up by the intellectual leadership of different eras.

Immigration was identified as one of the important factors in strengthening configurations of identity. Identity in a personalised sense referring to a sense of *alienation, uprooted ness, loneliness, loss of belongingness etc.* It was a metaphorical manifestation of how and the way an individual feels separated from his kin group and immediate neighborhood in which he had his primary socialisation. There were little or no hints of sociological categorisation in terms of loss of identity or construction or reconstruction of identity in terms of belonging to a particular group or community. *The uprooted* by Oscar Handlin (1951) is regarded as a major work that used *identity* or *identification* in 'an unselfconscious manner as part of the ordinary vocabulary of common discourse' (Gleason,1983). In contrast Will Herberg's *Protestant -Catholic Jew* (1955) placed *identity* and *identification* as key to locating oneself in a social context—in this case religion as the marker. Herberg said religion had become the most important tool for 'locating oneself in society' and thereby answering the most 'aching question' of 'identity': 'who am I'.

Herberg's work acquires strategic significance for later analysis of identity in sociological literature as it argues that ethnic identities of 'an immigrant-

derived population had transformed themselves into religious identification with organised Protestantism, Catholicism, or Judaism through the working of **Hansen's Law that argued that what the son wants to forget, the grandson wants to remember'**. This may be said to be the beginning of what has come to be called as 'the search for identity' in anthropological and sociological literature.

Let us draw some works that appeared in the fifty's and used *identity* with relative ease as compared to many writers in the seventy's and late eighty's who were particularly troubled by complexities of the term and its varied use in different contexts to evoke loyalties that went beyond the personal domain of identifying self in different religious, linguistic or ethnic categories. Take for example W.L.Morton's *The Canadian Identity* (1965) which regarded the construct of identity as unproblematic. But soon it was recognised in social science writings that 'identity becomes a problem for the individual in a fast changing society'. We must remember that context for majority of these writings was United States of America that was being portrayed as the 'Melting Pot' within which numerous markers of identity assumed by people before migrating were supposedly melted away and reconfigured to acquire a new nationality camouflaged as 'American identity'. By 1970s with onset of Vietnam War the myth of an encompassing American identity was broken.

As is evident from the brief historical overview, the journey of constructing identity has a long and established pathway. It is an altogether a different matter as to how it was conceptualised in different decades of social experiences by individuals for self and for locating themselves in social spaces where they interacted with others.

Box 23.1: Construction of Identity

In one sense, the term refers to qualities of sameness, in that persons may associate themselves or be associated by others, with groups or categories on the basis of some salient common feature, e.g. 'ethnic identity'. The term may also be applied to groups, categories, segments and institutions of all kinds, as well as to individual persons; thus families, communities, classes and nations are frequently said to have identities.

I am deliberately not elaboration on the concept if ethnic identity per se in this lesson as that is the subject matter of the lesson to follow. It will be suffice to say following Jenkins that 'ethnic identity, although every bit (and only) a social and cultural construction, should be conceptualised as a basis or first-order dimension of human experience' (Jenkins, 1998:75). We construct and reconstruct our 'ethnic identities' on the turf of our experiences that may differ from situation to situation. In this lesson our focus will remain on theoretical insights into identity construction (Byron, 2002).

23.3   Erikson's Contributions to Identity Construction

Erikson was trained in the discipline of psychology. He primarily worked as a clinical psychoanalyst with children. He lived in USA and his experiences as a European refugee and polices of Adolf Hitler and Second World War deeply influenced his writings. It was in the context of fallout of World War II that Erikson started constructing notions of identity. His early writings mostly published in the decade between fifty's and sixty's remained largely confined to intellectual community. It was in 1963 that his book *Childhood*

and Society was reprinted and that brought him immense popularity and acceptance among the general reader. His most significant contribution was his study of Mahatma Gandhi that won him both a Pulitzer Prize and a National book award. In 1973 he was selected to deliver prestigious Jefferson Lectures in Humanities that established him as an opinion leader and as Gleason says 'his ideas became something of a cultural phenomenon' (1983).

According to Erikson **Identity** is located *in the core of the individual and also in the core of his communal culture.* He elaborates this notion in the context of developing American identity and writes:

The process of American identity formation seems to support an individual's ego identity as long as he can preserve a certain element of deliberate tentativeness of autonomous choice. The individual must be able to convince himself that the next step is up to him and that no matter where he is staying or going he always has the choice of leaving or turning in the opposite direction if he chooses to do so. In this country the migrant does not want to be told to move on, nor the sedentary man to stay where he is: for the life style (and the family history) of each contains the opposite element as a potential alternative which he wishes to consider his most private and individual decision (1963:285-286).

Construction of social identities that border the domain of political remained pivotal to Erikson's writings though his primary focus was on personality formation during adolescence that essentially monitored future perception of identity by the individual. In his opinion:

Adolescence is the age of the final establishment of a dominant positive ego identity. It is then that a future within reach becomes part of the conscious life plan. It is then that the question arises whether or not the future was anticipated in earlier expectations. (Ibid) [1]

Reflection and Action 23.1

To what extent is identity formed in the adolescent years? What are its social components? Discuss and write down in your notebook.

Erikson's construction of identity draws inspiration from Freudian perceptions. In his article on 'American identity' he quotes Anna Freud at length and argues:

—in terms of the individual ego, which appears to be invaded by a newly mobilized and vastly augmented id as though from a hostile inner world, an inner outer world. Our interest is directed toward the quantity and quality of support to the adolescent ego, thus set upon, may expect from the outer world; and toward the question of whether ego defenses as well as identity fragments developed in earlier stages receive the necessary additional sustenance. What the regressing and growing, rebelling and maturing youths are now primarily concerned with is who and what they are in the eyes of a wider circle of significant people as compared with what they themselves have come to feel they are; and how to connect dreams, idiosyncrasies, roles, and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational and sexual prototypes of the day (ibid.250).

As you read through Erikson's original text you will come to terms with

intricacies of construction of identity as an individual and as an individual located in social context among individuals. Gleason developing this frame of reference for the construction of identity reasons that 'identity involves an interaction between the interior development of the individual personality, understood in terms derived from the Freudian id-ego-superego model, and the growth of a sense of selfhood that arises from participating in society, internalising its cultural norms, acquiring different statuses, and playing different roles' (1983: 465).

Erikson (1959) elaborated upon this notion of personal identity stating:

Personal identity was located deep in the unconscious as a durable and persistent sense of sameness of the self, whatever happens, however traumatic or dramatic the passage from one phase of life to another, the non pathological individual does not normally consider himself to have become someone else.

Largely drawing inspiration from the Freudian school as stated earlier Erikson believed that identity was located in the deep psychic structure of the individual. Our past experiences, our inhibitions and silent protests coupled with the kind of socialisation processes one has been subjected to, the adult constructs individual structures of identity accordingly. There is no denying that these structures mould themselves in correspondence with external social milieu. But inherent to it is an 'accrued confidence' in the 'inner sameness and continuity' of one's own being.

23.4   Identity and Identification

It is important at this stage to examine a closely related notion of identification. The term identification is in common use in different contexts. It was formally used in psychology by Sigmund Freud to explain a process by which a child relates and assimilate to itself external persons and objects. The concept was used as the key tool in psychoanalytical explanations of socialisation processes. For nearly two decades in the forty's and fifty's the concept of identification remained confined to psychoanalytical understandings. In 1954 Gordon W.Allport extended the notion of identification to explore ethnicity in his popular work The Nature of Prejudice.

> **Box 23.2: Concept of Identification**
>
> One of the areas where identification may most easily take place is that of social values and attitudes. Sometimes a child who confronts a social issue for the first time will ask his parent what attitude he should hold. Thus he may say, 'Daddy, what are we? Are we Jews or gentiles; Protestants or Catholics; Republicans or Democrats?' When told what 'we' are, the child is fully satisfied. From then on, he will accept his membership and the ready made attitudes that with it (Allport, 1954: *293-294).*

Contemporary social scientists recognise limitations of such assertions as we all know that individuals do not necessarily accept membership of 'ethnic groups' in this matter of fact manner that 'dad said it' and 'I believe in it'. In the later part of this lesson we will be discussing various modalities that intercept social and psychological domains of individuals to provide them markers for identification and identity assertions. However, it is important to assert here that in the history of evolution of construction of identity

and identity theories, Allport's contributions paved the way for relating notions of identity to popular sociological theories of role and reference group propounded by Ralph Linton and Merton respectively. Foote (1951) felt that Linton's role theory lacked 'a satisfactory account of motivation' and thus it will be better if theories of identification are mooted as explanations for 'motivation in social interactions'. Foote distinguished his use of the term identification from that of Freud. Foote defined Identification as: appropriation of and commitment to a particular identity or series of identities' on the part of an individual. Identification proceeds by naming and it meant individual to whom that name was given accepted and committed himself to that identity. In other words he accepts assignment to a category given to him on the basis of family, lineage, kinship religion, work activity or other attributes.

Identification thus construed provides for appropriation of these identities. It promotes ascription to identified categories and evolves a sense of 'selfhood'. A process of self-discovery and self-actualization is initiated-a process that is voluntary and not enforced by society. It is a different matter that as individuals grows they 'combine and modify identities by conscious choice more effectively then was possible for a child or a young person' (ibid, 466).

J. Milton Yinger examines identification as a consequence of process of assimilation. He argues that 'individuals from separate groups may come to think of themselves as belonging to the same society-a new society, blended from their societies of origin'. The context for Identification theorists as stated earlier remained United States of America. Numerous groups that migrated to US in the last two hundred years have gone through various phases of identification. Sometimes these groups surrendered to the dominant 'white culture' on others they asserted their traditional ethnic identities refusing to identify with the dominant culture.

Theoretically speaking Yinger reasons that shifts in identification are not really related to individual mindset but determined by cultural processes. These 'shifts may be one-sided, with members of group A identifying with society B, or members of group B identifying with society A'. All these three identification processes may go on simultaneously encouraging people to identify 'themselves simply as Americans', as Hispanics, Africans or Asian Americans. It is also equally true that throughout American history, some people have gone about identifying themselves as Indians, opting to live in traditional village settings and also accepting to become the village chief. Yinger concludes that 'identification is sometimes the major causal influence in the ethnic order; at other times it is more neatly dependent on the levels of integration, acculturation, and amalgamation'. (1997:137-139) It is important to note here that self-identification and identification by others is not necessarily correspondent to each other. Individuals or groups may ascribe themselves to certain nationalities or regions but are not necessarily accepted by others to be so. Ethnic conflicts in the North –East or displaced populations in Kashmir can constitute examples that may fit into this model. Yinger makes a very important point here, when he says that 'group solidarity among members of a group may block identification even with an open society' (ibid: 140).

23.5 Identity in Sociological Theory

Erikson's intellectual dominance in developing notions of identity has often paled contribution and importance of sociological theories in formulating constructs of social identity. Linton's contributions to the theory of status and role put forward in his important work The Study of Man (1936) came close to analyising notions of identity. Role theory developed by Linton showed how individuals performed roles in correspondence with statuses that they occupy. In doing so he demonstrated that individuals identified themselves in specified role positions. The role theory focused on the interactive nature of identity. People asserted their identities in response to specific situations where there were designated roles accompanying defined statuses that were perceived both by the actors and people in their surroundings. It was this perception that was critiqued by Foote and later modified by introducing elements of motivation paving way for constructing notions of identity that were closer to its vernacular meaning then to Erikson's notion of personal identity.

Reflection and Action 23.2

Relate and compare reference group theory to the personal identity theory.

Also at the same time Robert Merton developed one of the classic sociological theories called Reference group theory. The reference group was first brought in academic usage in 1942 and once again was popularly used by social psychologists. It was in 1950 that Robert Merton along with Alice S.Kitt introduced the term in sociological writings in an essay titled 'Contributions to the theory of Reference group Behaviour'. The concept was critical to the understanding of formation of identity as it highlighted the way a person's 'attitudes, values and sense of identity' was shaped by 'alignment with, or rejection of, 'reference groups' that had significance for the individual, either positively or negatively' (Gleason, 1983). The concept of reference group was further refined by Merton (1968) in his classic sociological text, Social Theory and Social Structure. Merton's primary concern was with examining Social Structures. He did not directly write much on identity or identification but emphasised on the need to place these concepts in the context of reference group theory as the reference group was instrumental in determining the core content of these constructs.

Box 23.3: Self and Identity

Identity acquired center space in sociological literature with the rise of theoretical perspectives referred to as Symbolic interactionists. *The school that came into prominence in the forty's tried to understand as to how 'social interaction mediated through shared symbolic systems, shaped the self consciousness of the individual' (Merton, 1968: 467). The protagonists of this school Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert mead did not use the term identity; instead spoke of 'the self'. 'The self' remained popular in sociological writings to connote what we have been discussing as 'identity' in this lessons till early sixty's. Erving Goffman (1963) was responsible in substituting 'the self' by 'Identity' in popular sociological writings. Goffman's work* Stigma: Notes on the Management of spoiled Identity *followed by Berger's* Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Approach, *the term identity became virtually a permanent fixture in unfolding intricacies of 'role theory and reference group theory, dramaturgical sociology, and the phenomenological approach'.*

Sociological perception of Identity is an artifact of interaction between the individual and society-it is essentially a matter of being designated by a certain name, accepting that designation, internalizing the role requirement accompanying it, and behaving according to those perceptions (Gleason,1983). As is apparent from this view of identity, identity in social settings accompanies a sense of responsibility combined with commitment or loyalty and perceived role requirements. It is formatted in social interactions and manifests itself in social situations. Sociologists would argue that 'identities are socially bestowed' and 'must also be socially sustained, and fairly steadily so' (cf. Gleason, 1983).

23.6   Multiple Identities

All contemporary theories of identity acknowledge that an individual endows himself with multiple identities. Some of these identities can be mutually exclusive and also competitive. Others may be compatible, allowing one to build on other- resulting in the formation of complex constructions of identity. Yinger explains this complex creation of identity formation saying:

Although some identities clash-if one grows in strength the others become less salient-others are nested into a compatible structure of identities. The smaller, more intimate identities are surrounded by larger and more impersonal ones. Think of the family, the community, the ethnic group, and society as concentric circles of identity. At any given time, any one can be the most salient, preferences varying, alternating sometimes on a calendrical rhythm (at culturally regulated intervals) and sometimes on a critical rhythm (the timing being determined by an event, perhaps a crisis, the occurrence of which cannot be determine) (*1997:*144).

Mehta (1989) made similar assertions in a paper titled 'Dilemma of Identity assertion in a pluralistic society: A case study of Indian polity' whereby a case was made for examining 'core' and 'peripheral identities' while discussing multiple identities experienced by people belonging to diverse communities in India. She argued:

Various religious, cultural and linguistic diversities occupying the Indian subcontinent are not crowds but specified communities to which every member subscribed with a sense of belonging. They have their respective histories and many other intra-community commonalities——the sense of belonging which keeps the members of these communities together irrespective of their geographical placements is termed as 'core identity'. However, members of these communities may not assert or even express these inherent associations ordinarily. It is only under situations of stress and on threat to their ethnic identity that they may express themselves *(ibid: 265).*

Sociological theory would conceptualise these processes of identification within the general purview of processes of assimilation. Yinger (1997) following Stein and Hill (1977), Sandra Wallman (1986) interalia expresses similar opinion —'individuals from separate groups may come to think of themselves as belonging to the same society—a new society, blended from their societies of origin'. Accompanying this construction is fact of 'identification by others which is as important as 'identification of the self within a group' if not more. Cultural anthropology for years has distinguished processes of integration from those of assimilation, amalgamation and acculturation.

Integration may not always mean acceptance of one group by the other. A politically or numerically dominant group may not assimilate a minority or a smaller group within its fold. At the same time a smaller group may be over anxious to be accommodated and may assert larger group identity, rather than acknowledging its ethnic roots. It is rightly argued that each person having multiple identities may express 'dominant identity' either because of the expectations of others, or as a 'matter of personal choice' or is forced by 'circumstances of the moment'.

In a general sense one may concur with Yinger (1997) that:

Identities can be inherited, chosen, assigned or merely inferred from some bit of evidence. If one strengthens the definition of identification to make it more than simply a label or category, one can with Royce, think of it as a validated place in an ethnic group. It is not merely ascription. Some ethnic identities have to be achieved, and they have to be maintained by behavior, by ethnic 'signaling'. "Adequate performance in an identity is much more rigorously judged within a group than it is by outsiders. For the latter, a few tokens of identity are usually sufficient."………That more commonly, or certainly more visibly, coerced ethnic identity is produced largely by outsiders. Opportunities denied, stereotypes, and legal and political definitions restrict one's ethnic options.

Nisbet also supports these contentions stating:

Throughout recorded history there is a high correlation between alienation of individual loyalties from dominant political institutions and the rise of new forms of community-ethnic, religious, and others- which are at once renunciations of and challenges to these political institutions.

23.7 National Character and Identity Studies

In the post-world war II era construction of identity moved from the domain of personal to constructing national identity as territories were being redefined and new nationalities being created across the world. Semblance of construction of these identities required that national character was defined and ensured as a moral value to make citizens conform to restructured boundaries with a sense of renewed passion and commitment. Large-scale migrations also required realignments. Social scientists attempted to evolve models that inculcated a sense of belonging among citizens prompting them to acquire national characters considered imperative for laying the foundations of nationalism. National character studies carried out by anthropologists like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict in the forty's acquired immense sociological significance, as it was in the background of these studies that Erikson made his concept of identity popular.

Box 23.4: Eriksons Conceptualisation of Identity

Functioning American………bases his final ego-identity on some tentative combination of dynamic polarities such as migratory and sedentary, individualistic and standardised, competitive and cooperative, pious and free thinking, etc' (Erikson, 1963). *Erikson goes on to talk about the 'subliminal panic' that accompanied large scale testing of 'American identity' in the war. 'Historical change', he said* has reached a coercive universality and a global acceleration, which is experienced as a threat to the emerging

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American identity. *(Cf. Gibbson, 1983)* . Erikson expanded his ideas of in a chapter titled 'reflections on the American identity' in which he almost equated notions of American character with American identity. He wrote what was true of national characters is true of national identities and that it would be better to use the term identity instead of national character.

National character studies were brought in the sociological discourse with the publication of Mead's And Keep your Powder Dry (1942) and Ruth Benedict's study of Japanese society The Chrysanthemum and the sword (1946). The focus in these studies was to explore how cultures influence individuals and their personalities and impact formation of their national characters. A concept that in modern day sociological analysis is often addressed in terms of ethnicity studies as has been pointed out in the first lesson on 'Conceptualizing ethnicity'. It is important to note here that Erikson developed his ideas on 'ego identity' and 'group identity' while following 'war time national character studies'. Even though the concept of 'identity' was inspired by national character studies, its popularity surpassed 'character studies. 'National character' studies are now invariably referred in a historical sense whereas 'identity' studies are being reinterpreted in almost all branches of social sciences. Identity construction is as much central to the disciplines of political science, History, Psychology, Anthropology as it is in the discipline of sociology. One tends to agree with Gleason's observations with regard to popularity of identity construction studies, when he says:

Identity promised to elucidate a new kind of conceptual linkage between the two elements of the problem, since it was used in reference to, and dealt with the relationship of, the individual personality and the ensemble of social and cultural features that gave different groups their distinctive character. *(cf. Sollors, 1996).*

Once linkages between construction of 'personal identity' and 'social identity' were firmly established, social scientists started looking at problems that individuals confronted in keeping congruence between the two in situations, where these two constructions of identity came in conflict with each other.

23.8   Conclusion

Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first scholars to draw attention of the academic community to the possibilities of individuals shrinking their worldview and enclosing their spaces to confine themselves 'in the solitude of his own heart' labeling this phenomenon as 'individualism'. Tocqueville analysed this problem while addressing issues emerging out of American conceptions of democracy and did not use the term 'identity' or 'identity crisis'.

Questions relating to identity acquired critical dimensions in the post world war period due to crumbling of citadel of colonialism and reconstruction of national boundaries. Vagaries of war resulted in mass exodus and people moved to different geographical zones seeking survival and sustenance for the self and their families. In-migration made local inhabitants circumspect and may individuals started realigning themselves on the basis of their religious, linguistic and racial identities. This resulted in enclosures in which in-group and out-groups were clearly defined and boundaries both psychological and social were deliberately created and reinforced through oral histories.

A peculiar situation emerged in what is often described as 'nation building process'. New nations along with established democracies like USA were promoting what was described earlier as 'national character studies'. This model expected people to conform to prescribed principles of liberty, equality and fraternity laying foundations for what is often described in sociological literature as 'mass societies'. 'Assimilation' was believed to be the natural norm for all those who moved from outside into the domains of their new habitats. National integration and national solidarities emanating from geographical concepts of nation state were the key issues on which political mandate was generated. In this process pursuits for seeking 'self' or 'individual identity' were either confined to the personalized domain of the individual or philosophy. Social identity operated under the assumed assumption of 'identification' with the larger social milieu that was represented by a 'mass society'. It is argued in sociological literature that the threat of mass society becoming 'totalitarian' and subsequently domineering to the extent of producing 'authoritarian personalities' susceptible to 'fascism' was first perceived by refugee intellectuals, many of whom had migrated from Germany. Described as **Frankfurt school**, it was related to two influential publications namely Riesman's The Lonely Crowd and Handlin's The Uprooted. These two works were rooted in a theoretical approach called **Dialectical Method**. Dialectic refers to a process of realising contradictions and reconciling those contradictions in a more realistic frame of reference. People who move from their homelands to other countries often experience a sense of loss that they try to come to terms with, through this process of idealist Hegelian philosophy.

It is important to reassert that 'identity' is a 'higher order concept' — a general organising referent which includes a number of subsidiary facets that include social identity, ego-identity, personal identity as other additional components (Dashefsky, 1976). Identity is all about what is common and what is specific. When interpreted in these dimensions it becomes the critical factor in establishing boundaries. How these boundaries are constructed and legitimized will be discussed in the next lesson.

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Unit 24
Boundaries and Boundary Maintenance

Contents

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to

◻   give definitions of ethnicity

◻   discuss ethnic group and boundaries

◻   analyse polyethnic societies

◻   describe the "melting pot" theory

24.1   Introduction

In the previous two lessons we talked about conceptualising ethnicity and construction of identity. It must be apparent to you by now that the notion of ethnic identity in the globalise world has emerged as the critical concept. It translates itself sometimes as nationalism, on others is responsible for creating sub nationalities within political nation states and determines notions of citizenship. In this lesson we will try and unfold some dimensions of this complex process of Boundaries and boundary maintenance.

24.2   Definitions of Ethnic Group

To begin with, we start with some simple definitions of 'Ethnic Groups'. Macmillan's *Dictionary of Anthropology* (1986) defines an 'Ethnic Group' as:

Any Group of People who set themselves apart and are set apart from other groups with whom they interact or coexist in terms of some distinctive criterion or criteria which may be linguistic, racial or cultural. The term is thus a very broad one, which has been used to include social CLASSES as well as racial or national minority groups in urban and industrial societies, and also to distinguish different cultural and social groupings among indigenous populations. The concept of ethnic group thus combines both social and cultural criteria, and the study of ethnicity focuses precisely on the interrelation of cultural and social process in the identification of and interaction between such groups.

Max Weber (1958) defined 'Ethnic Group' as:
Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or

*be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does
not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic
membership (Gemeinsamkeit) differs from the kinship group precisely by
being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the
latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only
facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.
On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how
artificially organised, that inspires belief in common ethnicity. This belief
tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community,
unless drastic differences in customs, physical type, or, above all, language
exist among its members. ....Groups, in turn, can engender sentiments
of likeness which will persist even after their demise and will have an
'ethnic' connotation. The political community in particular can produce such
an effect. But most directly, such an effect is created by the language
group, which is the bearer of a specific 'cultural possession of the masses'
(Massenkulturgut) and makes mutual understanding (verstehen) possible or
easier.* (Weber,1958)

These definitions draw our attention to subsequent boundaries that ethnic
groups evolve to form 'enclosures'. These enclosures are not defined by
geographical space or political identities but are distinguished by cultural,
linguistic or religious connectivity. Fredrik Barth, who can be called as the
original author of construction of this notion of boundaries in his famous
essay of 1969 titled 'Ethnic groups and Group boundaries' states categorically:

It is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them.
In other words, categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence
of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion
and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite
changing participation and membership in the course of individual life
histories.

To this he adds another important dimension that we will be debating in this
lesson:

*Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and
acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on
which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system
does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural
differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence*
(Barth, 1969).

It is often argued that boundaries are sustained because people remain
confined to cultural spaces. Even when they immigrate, they retain their
'cultural stuff' and do not surrender their individual cultural markers. It was
with these perceptions that Barth's historic contributions shifted 'focus of
investigation from internal constitution and history of separate groups to
ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance'. Before I dwell any further on
Barth's contributions in a separate section of this lesson, I want to emphasise
that the construction of boundaries as understood in sociological writings is
different from the way boundaries were construed by political scientists.
Territoriality certainly plays an important role in assertion and reassertion of
these diacritic but is not quintessential to the formation of these categories.
Political scientists would largely focus on the relationships that different
ethnic groups share with the state. Read with care the following paragraph

by Paul Brass— a name to reckon with, in understanding processes of elite formations and development of ethnic identities. Brass is often described as proponent of Instrumentalist school. He writes in his 1991 publication, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*:

Ethnic identity formation is viewed as a process that involves three sets of struggles. One takes place within the ethnic group itself for control over its material and symbolic resources, which in turn involves defining the group's boundaries and its rules for inclusion and exclusion[2]. The second takes place between ethnic groups as a competition for right, privileges, and available resources. The third takes place between the state and the groups that dominate it, on the one hand, and the populations that inhabit its territory.

Elaborating on these concerns, Brass poses certain significant questions such as:

Is the study of ethnicity a sub-branch of interest group politics or of class analysis or a separate subject in its own right? Or, to put it another way, are interest groups, classes and ethnic groups to be treated as analytically separable and coequivalent or is one or another category primary?

Brass also has definite opinion about sociological analysis of ethnicity and boundary maintenance. In his critical comments, he asserts:

Most sociological theories that are relevant to a discussion of ethnic groups and the state focus on society as a whole and take as their main theoretical issue the conditions for conflict or cohesion, national integration or internal war and treat the societal units-interest groups, classes, or ethnic groups —as givens rather than as objects for examination themselves. Too often neglected is the issue of how identity and cohesion within groups are formed and maintained in the first place, how political mobilisation of groups occurs, and how and why both group cohesion and mobilisation often decline. (Brass, 1985).

Given these deliberations, one may argue that ethnic identities are political positions, acquired and assumed through processes of cultural articulation and re-enforced through repetitive calls to threat to survival of these identities. They are primordial in the sense that people may be born as Hindus, Muslims, Jew, Whites or blacks. But assertion of these inherited categories of identification is dependent on situations in which individuals are involved and what kinds of advantages they perceive for itself in the given circumstances. One must also remember that these categories of ascription are also negotiable. Boundaries that an individual draws are always in inter-active situations. Boundaries are never drawn in social isolation. It is often my boundary versus your line of demarcation. The process remains the same irrespective of the fact whether it is a situation involving two individuals or ethnic groups. Even when dialogue is pursued or positions of confrontation adopted within the construct of a nation state, ethnic groups often assume categories in which those in power are perceived to be as status groups in control, thus different and domineering. Construction of situations of minority-majority conflicts, religious or linguistic conflicts or regional disparities are all construed in a patterned manner.

It is also interesting to underscore the fact that ethnicity is relative. In the context of maintenance of *boundaries* between various groups, Jenkins

notes '*ethnicity* shifting with the contexts of its mobilisation' and reasons that 'ethnicity is a function of inter-group relations; in the absence of such relations and their concomitant group boundaries ethnicity is unthinkable' (1997:90-91). The positions that are taken by Brass, Barth and Jenkins ethnicity becomes a resource that is encashed, manipulated, negotiated both with and between groups. But when it comes to talking about boundary maintenance, we tend to focus on inter-group constructions and how identity is manipulated within groups for assertion of differences.

24.3 Frederik Barth—Ethnic Group and Boundaries

Before, I dwell any further on the notion of manipulation and instrumentalities of maintaining ethnic group boundaries; it is essential to repeat some of assertions made in the seminal essay by Barth. To begin with, the definition of ethnic group as given by Narroll (1964) and described as an ideal type definition that essentially reviews ethnic group being viewed as =race=a culture=language=society is repeated:

- ethnic group is largely biologically self-perpetuating (Primordial)

- shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms

- make up a field of communication and interaction

- has a membership, which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

Barth's discomfort with this definition emanates from his position that 'it allows us to assume that *boundary maintenance is unproblematic* and follows from the isolation, which the itemised characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, and spontaneous and organised enmity'. Elucidating his point of view, Barth further asserts in the same paragraph:

This also limits the range of factors that we use to explain cultural diversity: we are led to imagine each group developing its cultural and social form in relative isolation, mainly in response to local ecologic factors, through a history of adaptation by invention and selective borrowing. This history has produced world of separate peoples, each with their culture and each organised in a society, which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island itself.

Reflection and Action 24.1

Outline Barth's position on boundary maintenance, and then discuss its various aspects.

Barth in his analysis prefers to look at sharing of these important attributes not as being primacy or definitional attribute but as 'implied' or 'resultant'. These attributes may be examined as repositories for 're-inventing' oneself and not necessarily as morphological attributes for establishing group identities within contained geographical spaces. People may move away, yet retain some if not all of their core cultural attributes. They may also live at the same place but modify some of their cultural traits for ecological adjustments or for social adaptation without allowing their sense of belonging to their specific cultural group being invaded in any form. In Barth's own terms:

It is thus inadequate to regard overt institutional forms as constituting the cultural features, which at any time distinguish ethnic group — these overt forms are determined by ecology as well as by transmitted culture. Nor can it be claimed that every such diversification within a group represents a first step in the direction of subdivision and multiplication of units. We have also known documented cases of one ethnic group, also at a relatively simple level of economic organisation, occupying several different ecologic niches and yet retaining basic cultural and ethnic unity over long periods (cf; e.g., inland and coastal Chukchee (Bogoras, 1904-9) or reindeer, river, and coast Lapps (Gjessing, 1954; Barth, 1969).

After asserting importance of retaining cultural features, and their importance as building blocks of 'identity formations' within ethnic groups, Barth highlights the most critical feature of ethnic group formation the fact of 'ascription'.

24.4 Ascription as the Critical Factor

Ethnic groups are recognised as status categories. Within these categories it is crucial that members of these groups ascribe themselves to these formations and their membership is so recognised by the others. Processes of interaction are thus determined by this concept of belongingness, which is not only attributed by the self to the group but is also recognised by the others. Denial of this ascription is problematic for the survival of the individual in a group and that of group in any inter-ethnic situation. Cultural emblems like dress, dialect, symbols play a significant role in the assertion of ascription. Emphasising the criterion of ascription, Barth(1969) states:

When defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organisation formation the group may change-yet the fact of continuing dichotomisation between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.

Box 24.1: Investigating Ethnic Boundaries

Barth argues that for researching that he terms 'investigating', the 'ethnic boundary' that defines the group becomes critical for analysis and not the 'cultural stuff' that comprises the group. This is a position that is confronted by various scholars in particular by Jenkins. The 'cultural stuff' in Barth's definition comprises of language, religion, laws, traditions, customs-infect all the attributes that Tylor addressed in his famous definition of culture. This definition of 'ethnic group' is said to be in direct line with the contention of ethnic group' held by Max Weber-as defined in the beginning of this lesson. According to Jenkins this argument is partly justified and should remain central to our understanding of ethnicity. But he also believes that if we follow this in letter and spirit, we run the risk of considering 'cultural stuff' as irrelevant to the process of boundary maintenance.

It is actually this 'cultural stuff' that outlines distinctiveness and sustains differentiation. In Jenkins words:

In insisting that there is no simple equation between seamless tapestry of cultural variation and the discontinuities of ethnic differentiation, it

*prevents us from mistaking the morphological enumeration of cultural traits
for the analysis of ethnicity. However, this argument might also be construed
as suggesting that the cultural stuff out of which that differentiation is
arbitrarily socially constructed is somehow irrelevant, and this surely cannot
be true. For example, a situation in which As and Bs are distinguished, inter
alia, by languages that are mutually intelligible for most everyday purposes-
as with Danish and Norwegian* (These were the communities that Jenkins
was analysing for constructing his model of ethnicity)—*would seem to differ
greatly from one in which the languages involved are, as with English and
Welsh, utterly different.* (1997:107).

One may infer then that in polyethnic societies, every ethnic group draws
boundaries using its 'cultural stuff' as critical in maintaining these cultural,
often political and economic categories. Yet, one need not forget that
'boundaries' may persist, even when there is 'little cultural differentiation'.
As sollors would put it:

The cultural content of ethnicity (the stuff which Barth's boundaries enclose)
is largely interchangeable and rarely historically authenticated.

24.5   Poly-ethnic Societies

Barth in his construction of 'ethnic boundaries' prefers to use the term poly
ethnic instead of more commonly used Greco-Roman term 'multi-ethnic'. He
takes us back to the work of Furnivall (1944). Furnivall had said that in a
plural society –'poly ethnic society integrated in the market place, under the
control of a state system dominated by one of the groups, but leaving large
areas of cultural diversity in the religious and domestic sectors of
activity.........but what has not been appreciated by later anthropologists is
the possible variety of sectors of articulation and separation, and the variety
of poly-ethnic systems which entails' (ibid,301).

We in India experience these differentiations in our day-to-day activities.
India with its diverse populations, regional differences, linguistic pot pouri
and multi religious character shares a unique political umbrella. Ethnic
differences are articulated and once accompanied by political ambitions often
emerge as strong movements. However, what has been remarkable about
these articulations is that homogeneity is never perceived as the common
plank against which dissidence is to be voiced. These movements may have
been symbolic of seeking representations that were largely 'cultural' but
were imbued with political meanings- something that Brass like to term as
instrumentalities for achieving political ends. Barth (1969) in this regard has
opted for a distinct position arguing:

Nothing can be gained by lumping these various systems (poly-ethnic, multi-
cultural systems) *under the increasingly vague label of 'plural society'............*

What can be referred to as articulation and separation on the macro –level
corresponds to systematic sets of role constraints on the micro-level. Common
to all these systems is the principle that ethnic identity allowed to play, and
partners he may choose for different kinds of transactions.

In other words, regarded as a status, ethnic identity is similar to sex and
rank, in that it constraints the incumbent in all his activities, not only in
some defined social situations. One might thus also say that it is imperative,

in that it cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside by other definitions of the situation. The constraints on a person's behavior which springs from his ethnic identity thus tend to be absolute and, in complex poly-ethnic societies, quite comprehensive; and the component moral and social conventions are made further resistant to change by being joined in stereotyped clusters as characteristic of one single identity.

Box 24.2: The Ethnic Nuclei

It is ironic, that even when we try to deny mostly as a patriotic gesture that we are 'Indians first and foremost and Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or Punjabis, Bengali, Gujarati etc. later, we do sustain and nurture with enormous amount of jealousy our primary identities and subsequently boundaries associated with these identities.. In an effort to remind ourselves about our sub-conscious or conscious boundaries, we often pay ritualistic tribute to cultural traits that tell us — 'we are different'. It can be dress, pride in our rational food or art form. Each of these is a symbolic and essential attribute to assertion of our status in society that is essentially poly-ethnic. We do this also to reorganize ourselves and to sustain what some authors would like to call the 'ethnic nuclei'.

Barth in his work has categorically stated that it is not only the marginalised or ridiculed in the society, responsible for pronouncing the ethnic boundaries but also all members of an ethnic groups in a poly ethnic society can act to maintain dichotomies and differences—sometimes as in the case of Bourne making what one may believe sound intellectual statements.

24.6 Melting Pot and Beyond

It was submersion of individual ethnic nuclei in a larger, somewhat abstract perception of 'national identity' that dominated ethnic debates in America in the post world war II period. A debate that assumed in the light of statements made by Bourne that America was emerging as near perfect example of a 'melting pot of races'- an institution in which all races, groups coming from various parts of the world to settle in America melt their boundaries in a common pot of 'American National Identity'-the trans national Identity.

Milton Gordon (1964) in his book *Assimilation in American Life* made sustained effort to distinguish pluralism from assimilations. The concept of Melting pot implied assimilation at the expense of individual communities forgoing their individual identities and evolving the nationalistic 'American individual'. The concept of 'Melting pot' rooted in notions of 'Anglo-conformity' 'demanded the complete renunciation of the immigrant's ancestral culture in favour of the behaviour and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group', according to Gordon.

Reflection and Action 24.2

Explain the concept of the "melting pot" theory. Put your answer down in your diary.

Newman has evolved a formula to explain this when he suggests that A+B+C=A. In this case A is the dominant culture and others are expected to submerge their differences in this encompassing identity. This may also imply that A+B+C=D, that is, different cultures when put together in a Melting pot give up their individual identities to evolve a different identity that is common

to all and symbolises the citizen in a democratic state. Werner Sollors in the following discussion elaborates on some components of this debate among the students deliberating on notions of ethnicity and boundary maintenance in America:

In common usage, 'melting pot' could stand for both these concepts. The resulting ambiguity -did melting pot translate into A+B+C=D or into A+B+C=A further contributed to make this image the perfect fall guy in maddeningly circular debate about ethnicity. As 'D' it could be denounced from boundary -constructing ethnic point of view. If the remainder of commitments to what Orlando Patterson has referred to as 'the universal culture' made this position embarrassing, the 'A': melting pot or amalgamation was denounced as a mere smoke screen for Anglo-Saxon conformity (or, in a variant, for racism). The most persistent rhetorical feature of American discussions of the melting pot is therefore contradictory rejection that asserts ethnicity against A+B+C=D and then recoils to defend universalism against A+B+C=A. 'Refuting' the melting pot-an activity American writers and scholars never seem to cease finding delight in (some studies have termed these debates as mushrooming of an anti melting pot industry)—*allows us to have the ethnic cake and eat universalism, and to denounce universalism as a veiled form of 'Anglo-conformity' at the same time.*

Inherent in these debates is the suggestion that cultures do not have temperatures and predicting their malleability beyond a point where they loose both form and content is a mere figment of imagination. In other words the industry that grew up denouncing an ephemeral notion of melting pot simply suggests that come what may, 'boundaries somehow sustain themselves' and thus acquire significant dimensions in any study of ethnic groups.

24.7 Critique of Barth's Model

There is no denying that Barth's model offers interesting insights into processes of cultural configurations and their perseverance, irrespective of forces demanding change and continuous pressures of accommodation. To argue that there is no structure or to put it in Sollors words 'there is no emperor, there are only clothes', is a proposition that some scholars find difficult to comprehend. In his comments on Barth's study of Swat Pathan, Louis Dumont offers a subtle statement: 'The main thing is to *understand*, and therefore ideas and values can not be separated from *"structure"*.

Jenkins and Abner Cohen find Barth's arguments restrictive. In their opinion Barth fails to incorporate dynamic nature of ethnicity in his efforts to evolve a model of 'enclosures' defined by 'self ascriptive boundaries'. Cohen's logic is: (Barth's) *separation between 'vessel' and 'content' makes it difficult to appreciate the dynamic nature of ethnicity. It also assumes an inflexible structure of the human psyche and implicitly denies that personality is an open system given to modifications through continual socialization under changing socio-cultural conditions.*

Talal Asad (1972) in his work 'Market Model, Class Structure and Consent: A Reconsideration of Swat Political Organisation' want to maintain Boundaries' places Barth in Hobbesian tradition.

Box 24.3: Boundary Maintenance

Common arguments found in the literature that can be decoded as critique of Barth's model take the course that 'barth's theory leaves us guessing about the reasons why people want to maintain boundaries. Is it a primordial trait according to which human being s want to distance themselves from others, create and maintain boundaries, even when the area that is enclosed by these boundaries appears to be, at least from a structural view, identical?' (Sollors, 1981). Or to put it in the words of Joshua A. Fishman-'If there can be no heartland without boundaries, however distant they may be, there can be no boundaries unless there is a heartland'.

a) Sustenance of Boundaries

Critique not withstanding, there is evidence to suggest that ethnic groups sustain boundaries and retain identity markers to distinguish categories of ascription. We will briefly review some factors that support this process of boundary sustenance. It is understandable that under different circumstances, critical factors sustaining definitions and boundaries are likely to be different. A crucial factor that impacts is the element of security. Barth argues:

In most political regimes, however, where there is less security and people live under a greater threat of arbitrariness and violence outside their primary community, the insecurity itself acts as a constraint on inter-ethnic contacts.

This sense of insecurity promotes a sense of enclosure within the community and results in hardening of boundaries visa-vie other groups. It may further be added that if there are historical and cultural factors that purport differences , the pace at which boundaries are sustained may be accentuated. Essays listed in Barth's edited volume showed that in each case boundaries were maintained by a limited set of cultural features. It may also be remembered that 'the persistence of the unit then depends on the persistence of these cultural differentiae'. Barth in his concluding remarks posits:

However, most of the cultural matter that at any time is associated with a human population is not constrained by this boundary; it can vary, be learnt, and change without any critical relation to the boundary maintenance of the ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously, in the same sense, tracing the history of 'a culture': the elements of the present culture of that ethnic group have not sprung from the particular set that constituted the group's culture at a previous time, whereas the group has a continual organisational existence with boundaries (criteria of membership) that despite modifications have marked off a continuing unit.

Within the precepts of notions of Nation-state, the Majority-Minority situations further the process of ethnic distancing and segment boundaries. Minority situations are often under pressure for fear of rejection by the host population.

As an epilogue to these three chapters on *ethnicity, Identity and Boundary maintenance,* and to provide a perspective on how relevant these *concepts, constructions and Boundaries* are for understanding contemporary political and social realities; a section on Nationalism, Citizenship and boundaries is incorporated.

24.8 Conclusion

'Nationalism is the political doctrine which holds that humanity can be divided into separate, discrete units-nations-and that each nation should constitute a separate political unit-a state. The claim to nationhood usually invokes the idea of a group of people with a shared culture, often a shared language, sometimes a shared religion, and usually but not always a shared history; to this it adds the political claim that this group of people should, by rights, rule themselves or be ruled by people of the same kind (nation, ethnicity, language, religion etc.)'(Jonathan Spencer, 2002). This conception assumes nations to be homogenous following classical precepts of ethnographic explorations that argued that 'people can be classified as belonging to discrete, bounded cultures or societies'. The construct of a Poly-ethnic society comes loaded with notions of multiple nationalities that are bounded to each other by a common perception of loyalty, while retaining distinct boundaries that do not disturb the precinct of internationally accepted territoriality.

Some recent studies on the subject attempt to study the 'nation-state from the point of view of modern ethnicity theory….. equating regional politics=ethnicity=building blocks of new nations in the post 1947 era, as "self consciousness of a group of people united or closely related, by shared experiences such as language, religious belief, common heritage or political institutions". Increasingly, it is now being perceived that the notion of sovereign nation-state and an over arching concern with one's own nationalism is instrumental in generating violence within the confines of 'legitimate perceptions' of protection of defined national/ethnic boundaries. If people in Kashmir, Bodoland or other parts of the Indian Nation state are fighting for the protection of their perceived boundaries the 'armed forces' are struggling to keep 'national boundaries' intact.

'Ethnicity emerges out of the cusp between the relation between the *citizen* and those officially defined as *outsider, stranger* or *Marginal.* But, it emerges not purely from the logic of citizenship and development, but from the structure of electoral logic, from the normalcy of Majority-Minority politics' (Visvanathan, 2003).

The world today is witnessing upheavals often rooted in notions of 'self'. I am referring back to first and second lesson talking about how individuals perceive and construct 'identity' and it collective translation into 'ethnicity'. We often come across essays on 'resurgence or revival of ethnicity' and how in the context of 'nation-state', these constructions pose problems of 'instability'. I am not making any efforts in these concluding remarks to answer any queries that may trouble your mind as you try and understand these complex processes affecting our lives. I am closing these lessons by repeating some questions that social scientists often pose to themselves and to fellow students to get closer to empirical processes that are unfolding before us.

By the sixteenth century………the word nation expanded to include a people, a population. National identity now derived from membership in a people and finally nation referred to a "unique people" or a "unique sovereign people". And it is the trajectory of definitions that became problematic. The nation, instead of being an open category, threatens to become an exclusionary

process. The seeds of ambivalence and violence are rooted here and it steps from

- The idea of citizenship as a static entity

- The problematic nature of identity

- The positivism between territory and a people and the fixity of boundaries

- *The genocidal nature of the exclusionary process.*

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Unit 25
Concepts of Difference and Inequality

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

▫ distinguish between natural and social inequality

▫ explain the causes and consequences of social inequality

▫ discuss the major theoretical approaches towards the understanding of social inequality

25.1   Introduction

The concept of inequality lies at the root of some of the major theoretical formulations in society. It constitutes the basic component of the phenomenon of stratification in society which some of the senior and established sociologists as also younger scholars have studied extensively and on which they have written articles, monographs, and textbooks. In a general sense, inequality refers to imbalance in quantity, size, degree, value, or status. This often implies an imbalance in ability or resources to meet a challenge. Inequality in societies in general is manifest in caste, class, gender, and power relations. In simple societies based on kinship, stratification is evident in status distinctions determined by age, sex, and personal characteristics as among Australian aboriginal communities (see Sahlins, 1969).

In this unit, we will explore the twin concepts of difference and inequality intensively. The major concern here is with finding out how and in what conditions differences between people get transformed into inequalities. Having determined the point of departure between difference and inequality, we will explore the two broad types of inequality, i.e., natural inequality, and social inequality. We will subsequently discuss the major theoretical approaches towards the understanding of social inequality.

25.2   Difference and Inequality: Conceptual Understanding

People in a society are divided into different categories based on one or a set of criteria. Social stratification refers to the division of people into different categories. These categories may simply reflect differences between people grouped into them. The implicit assumption here is that the difference

between categories is important, however, no weightage is given to the difference between them, i.e., the categories are not assigned unequal statuses or unequal rewards. The different categories of people are treated alike and one is not treated as more significant than the other. This is the concept of difference in social categories. When unequal statuses and rewards are attached to social categories and these are ranked on the basis of one or more defining factors, they are treated as unequal. According to Gupta (2004), differences assume importance when ranking diversities becomes difficult. Social stratification incorporates concepts of both difference and inequality.

Box 25.1: Social Stratification: Difference and Inequality

"If instead of power or wealth one takes into account forms of stratification based on difference then the geological model cannot be easily invoked. For example, linguistic differences cannot be placed in a hierarchical order. Looked at closely, neither should differences between men and women be understood in terms of inequality. Sadly, however, such differences are never always allowed to retain their horizontal status. They usually tend to get hierarchised in popular consciousness. This is where prejudice takes over. Men are deemed to be superior to women, certain linguistic groups are held to be less civilised and cultivated than others, and religious bigotry prevails, all because most of us are not conditioned to tolerate difference qua difference.

The conceptual need to separate these two orders arises because in the sociology of social stratification attention is directed to the manner in which hierarchy and difference relate to each other. If hierarchy and difference could hold on to their respective terrains then there would be no real need to study stratification as a special area of interest. If it is hierarchy alone that is of interest, then 'social inequality' would be a good enough rubric within which to organise our study. If, on the other hand, it is only difference that is of concern then the tried and tested term 'social differentiation' should do adequately. The term 'social stratification', however, is not a synonym of either social inequality or of social differentiation" (Gupta, 2004:120-121).

Béteille (1969) suggests that two aspects of social inequality deserve mention. The first is the distributive aspect which refers to the different factors (e.g. income, wealth, occupation, education, power, skill) that are distributed in the population. It provides the basis of inter-personal interactions in society. The second is the relational of aspect which refers to the ways in which the individuals differentiated by the different factors relate to each other within a system of groups and categories. Here the thrust is on interaction of people belonging to one group or category. He explains that the major forms of social inequality that have been studied by sociologists intensively are those that arise out of disparities of wealth and income; those that have a bearing on unequal prestige or honour; and those that are born out of imbalance in the distribution of power.

Unequal distribution of wealth and honour in society affords the following widespread consequences,

1) "Differences in wealth will produce fairly distinct strata of people who will be separated from each other by those differences and who may come over time to form quite distinct social units.

2) Such segmentation of the society lessens the possibility of social solidarity and, in turn, of societywide consensus on the most important issues, such as the uses of public funds.

3) The unequal earnings of people in different positions may produce unequal commitment to the society's norms and laws and result in higher rates of deviant behaviour, such as crime, than might otherwise occur.

4) Strata that are separated by unequal wealth and the unequal ability to purchase basic life chances, such as education and health, are likely to engage in hostile or conflictual encounters as they struggle for shares of wealth.

5) Very low income and honour may produce high rates of pathologies, such as mental disorder, physical illness, shortened life, crime, and high rates of accidents.

6) The chances to achieve full equality of opportunity for all and, with that, a high degree of fairness in the system will be lessened as wealthier people use their wealth to give their children special advantages over the children of poorer families.

7) Through such transmission of unequal advantage over generations, the social divisions among people may become hardened.

8) The discovery of the full range of talent in society is likely to be less effective when mobility is restricted by the transmission of advantages from parent to child.

9) Low income may make it difficult to induce the less well rewarded people to give their conscientious best to the tasks for which they are suited" (Tumin, 1985: 158-159).

Welfare states intervene in order to supplement small incomes when they are not enough to meet basic needs.

We often encounter inequality in our daily lives in terms of differentiation and comparison of people based on wealth, power, and gender. At the international level too, countries are compared and ranked on the basis of economic and political power. Countries of the world are divided into three categories, (i) the First World comprising of U.S. and its allies in the cold war, these were the developed, capitalist nations, (ii) the Second World comprising the U.S.S.R. and to its allies, these were the developed communist nations; and (iii) the Third World comprising most of Latin America and recently independent African and Asian states, these were the underdeveloped countries that did not align with the west or the east in the cold war — many of them were members of the Non-Aligned Movement. There is no denying that this terminology is being increasingly replaced with developed and developing nations to refer to First World nations and Third World nations respectively. Developed nations are those in which economy is based on industrialisation and people's standard of life is high as also their literacy rate and life expectancy. Developing nations, on the other hand are those in which the process of industrialisation set in late and the people's standard of life, literacy rate and life expectancy is low. These nations struggle to acquire the standard of life in developed nations. The human development index (based on indicators such as life expectancy at birth, literacy rates, and gross development product) measures the degree of development in a country and in doing so forms the basis of ranking them.

Economic inequality among world nations may be understood through dependency theory developed in the late 1950s under the guidance of Prebisch — the then Director of the United Nations Commission for Latin America. Prebisch and his colleagues were deeply concerned about the fact that economic development in industrialised countries did not lead to a similar trend in the poorer countries, rather, it often resulted in economic problems in the latter. Dependency theory was developed in order to explain the persistent poverty of poorer countries by examining patterns of interaction among nations and by suggesting that inequality between them was an intrinsic part of those interactions (see Ferraro, 1996).

More clearly stated, dependency theory explains that countries in the world fall into two categories: wealthy nations that are the core countries and poorer nations that are the peripheral countries. The core countries obtain the resources and raw material from peripheral countries. Here, they are processed and finally returned to the peripheral nations as manufactured goods. While the poor nations provide the natural resources, cheap labour and confirmed destination of finished products that are priced exorbitantly, the wealthy nations maintain their superiority over them. Surely, without the input from peripheral nations, the core nations will not be able to maintain their position. Since it is in their interest, the core nations perpetuate the situation of inequality through different economic and human resource development policies. Resistance by peripheral countries is met with imposition of economic sanctions, stringent policies of international trade and commerce, sometimes military invasion.

25.3 Natural and Social Inequality

Interest in the subject of the origin and foundation of inequality in society may be traced to the times of Rousseau. He explained that equality prevailed so long as people remained content with their way of life — one in which they wore clothes of animal hides, adorned their bodies with feathers and shells and confined themselves to the activities that each person could perform individually. From the time one person began to stand in need of help of another, when one person began to collect provisions, work became inevitable and equality in relationships disappeared. Rousseau (1754) identified two kinds of inequality among people, (i) natural or physical inequality referring to difference of age, health, bodily strength, and mental abilities; and (ii) moral or political inequality referring to differences in privileges that are established or authorized by the consent of people themselves e.g. power, honour.

Tocqueville (1956) accepted that inequality imposed by nature on people was difficult to get rid of and that equality remained a cherished ideal. He distinguished between aristocratic society (which was characterised by rigid hierarchy of estates or castes) and democratic society (which was characterised by mobility of individuals across classes). Society in Europe prior to the nineteenth century was aristocratic; society in America in the first half of the nineteenth century was democratic in character. Tocqueville's contrast between aristocratic and democratic societies stretched beyond their political organisation to incorporate social distinctions, religious experiences, and aesthetic sensibilities. Despite the fact that Tocqueville belonged to aristocratic society, he was impressed with egalitarianism or the principle of equality pervading different dimensions of life. He firmly believed that some day, Europe and the rest of the world would be under the cover

of equality. He agreed that western civilisation did, in principle, recognise equality even though its own institutions were hierarchical.

Later, Béteille developed Tocqueville's idea that all systems are mixed and that in real situations pure hierarchy or equality does not exist. What exists, however is, "moving equilibrium between incompatible and ever-varying forces" (Macfarlane, 1999: 288). Béteille proposed a distinction between harmonic system (in which society is divided into groups that are hierarchically placed and the ordering is considered as appropriate) and disharmonic systems (in which there is no consistency between the order in which groups are arranged and the natural scheme of things i.e., there is a discrepancy between the existential and normative orders). He explained the disharmonic system in terms of one which upholds equality as an ideal but practices inequality. In Béteille's own words (1977:1), "The great paradox of the modern world is that everywhere men attach themselves to the principle of equality and everywhere, in their own lives as well as in the lives of others, they encounter the presence of inequality. The more strongly they attach themselves to the principles or the ideology of equality the more oppressive the reality becomes". We often encounter natural inequality in terms of differences in capacities in potential, abilities bestowed on individuals by nature that make for unequal endowment of opportunities available to them. Béteille (1983: 8) writes, "To an anthropologist for whom the variety of cultures has a central place in the human scheme of things, it would appear that the idea of natural inequality is inherently ambiguous, if not a contradiction in terms. Nature presents us only with differences or potential differences. With human beings these differences do not become inequalities unless and until they are selected, marked out and evaluated by processes that are cultural and not natural. In other words differences become inequalities only with the application of scales; and the scales with which we are concerned in talking about inequalities in a social context are not given to us by nature, but culturally constructed by particular human beings under particular historical conditions".

Consider the example of the two children — one who is blind by birth and the other who has normal vision. The two children are endowed with unequal abilities that make them perform the same task with unequal precision. So long as we do not evaluate the performance of the two children and judge their abilities, there is no perception of inequality — natural or social. The two children are said to be differently endowed by nature. Natural inequality between them is perceived when we asses their performance. We then refer to natural inequality to mean inequality meted out by nature itself. Natural inequality becomes the basis of providing opportunities and resources, providing privileges and discriminations that form the groundwork of social inequality. One example of social inequality is enfolded in division of labour which is accompanied with inequality in status and power. Simplistically viewed, division of labour corresponds with social differentiation. Some positions are held in esteem while are associated with subjugation.

Reflection and Action 25.1

Distinguish between natural inequality and social inequality.

25.4 Major Theoretical Perspectives

There are at least three theoretical perspectives on social stratification. The first is the functionalist perspective which seeks to explain social stratification

in terms of its contribution to the maintenance of social order and stability in society. Like other functionalists, Parsons believed that order and stability in society are based on values held in common by people in society. Those individuals who conduct themselves in accordance with these values are ranked above others. Thus, a successful business executive would be ranked above others in a society which values individual achievement while individuals who fight battles and wars would be ranked above others in a society which values bravery and gallantry. Functionalists uphold that relationship between social groups in society is one of cooperation and inter-dependence. Parsons explains that in a highly specialised industrial society, some people specialise in organisation and planning while others follow their directives. Certain positions are functionally more important in society than others. These are often ranked higher in the social hierarchy and fetch greater rewards than others. This inevitability leads to inequality in distribution of power and prestige.

The second is the Marxist perspective which differs from the functionalist perspective in focusing on divisive rather than integrative aspect of social stratification. Marxists regard social stratification as a means through which the group in the upper rungs exploits those in the lower rungs. Here the system of stratification is based on the relationship of social groups to the forces of production. More clearly stated, Marxists identify two major strata in society: one that controls the forces of production hence rules over others, second that works for the ruling class. Form Marxian standpoint, economic power governs political power. The ruling class derives its power form ownership and control over forces of production. The relations of production prevail over major institutions, values and belief systems. Evidently the political and legal system pursue the interests of the ruling class. The ruling class oppresses the serving class. Thus, stratification in society serves to foster exploitation and hostility between the two major strata.

The critical terms in the Marxian framework of social stratification are, (i) class consciousness by which is meant the awareness, the recognition by the people belonging to a class (e.g., workers) of their place in the production process and of their relation with the owning class. Class consciousness also subsumes the awareness of the extent of exploitation by the owning class in terms of their deprivation of and appropriate share in the 'surplus value' of goods produced by them. Over time, workers realise that the way to relieve themselves of the exploitation and oppression is overthrowing the capitalist owners through unified, collective revolution; (ii) class solidarity by which is meant the extent to which the workers join together in order to achieve their economic and political objectives; and (iii) class conflict by which is meant struggle when class consciousness has not matured or it may be conscious struggle in the form of collective assertions and representations of workers intended to improve their lot.

The third is the Weberian perspective according to which social stratification is based on class situation which corresponds with market situation. Those who share common class situation also share similar life chances. They constitute one strata. Weber identified four groups in a capitalist society: the propertied upper-class, the property-less, white collar workers; the petty bourgeoisie; and the manual working class. Weber did agree with Marx on the significance of the economic dimension of stratification. He, however, added the aspects of power and prestige to the understanding of social

stratification. Weber was convinced that differences in status led to differences in lifestyles.

Tumin (1985:13) explains this more clearly, "As distinguished from the consequences of property differences for life chances, status differences, according to Weber, lead to differences in *life styles* which form an important element in the social exclusiveness of various status groups. Status groups acquire honour primarily by usurpation. They claim certain rewards and act out their claims in terms of certain manners and styles of behavior and certain socially exclusive activities. And while status groups do not usually rest on any legal basis in modern societies, corresponding legal privileges are not long in developing once the status groups stabilize their positions by securing economic power". In short, much like Marx, Weber agreed that property differences are important in forming of status groups. Property differences also define the lines of distinction and privileges among them. Unlike Marx, Weber assigned greater importance to status groups than to the development of community feeling and motivation for undertaking concerted action by members of an economic class against the system. Weber also laid stress on party which often represents interests determined through 'class situation and status situation'. According to Weber, the economic aspect is crucial in classes, honour is crucial in status groups, and power is crucial in parties.

Weber's perspective on social stratification derives from three components: class, status, and power. Betellie (1969: 370) writes, "In Weber's scheme, class and power appear to be generalised categories: the former arises form unequal life chances in a market situation and the latter form the nature of domination which is present in one form or another in all the societies. Status, on the other hand, seems to be a kind of residual category". Weber clarified that social honour (in capitalist societies of the west too) is not solely determined by possession of wealth or power. He said that social honour is linked with values, not material interests. Evidently, the determinants of status honour are not only economic power and political power but also style of life which includes material components and non-material components (e.g. literacy and /or artistic sensibilities). In case of material component, it is easy to superimpose economic advantages on advantages of status i.e., those who are able to strengthen their economic condition are also to acquire status in industrialized societies (given to mass production of consumer goods, and common media of communication). The spread of uniformised education greatly reduces distinction between non-material component of people's style of life. Béteille (1969) explains that economic advantages are not easily translated into status advantages because of several reasons. In order to acquire an exclusive style of life, an individual has to be a part of a particular social milieu. Often , he/she has to encounter resistance from those who are a part of that social circle. This resistance suggests the importance attached to inequality.

> **Reflection and Action 25.2**
> Discuss the major theoretical perspectives on social stratification.

25.5 The Debate

Kinsley Davis and Wilbert Moore discussed the issues of functional necessity of stratification, determinants of positional rank, societal functions and stratification, and variation in stratified system at length. They explained

that unequal distribution rights and perquisites making for social inequality provides the motivation to people to perform duties associated with a given position and to achieve position that affords more prestige and esteem. Social inequality, therefore ensures that "the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons. Hence every society, no matter how simple or complex, mist differentiate persons in terms of both prestige or esteem, and mist therefore possess a certain amount of institutionalised inequality" (Davis and Moore, 1967: 48). The positions that carry the best reward and highest rank are those that are excessively important for society, and require greatest training or talent. They clarify that in effect, a society needs to accord sufficient reward to position of high rank only to ensure that they are filled competently. It may also be understood that a position important in one society may not be equally important in another one.

Tumin (1953, rpt.1967: 53) summarises the central argument advanced by Davis and Moore in sequential propositions stated in the following words:

1) "Certain positions in any society are functionally more important than others, and require special skills for their performance.

2) Only a certain number of individuals in any society have the talents which can be trained into the skills appropriate to these positions.

3) The conversion of talents into skills involves a training period during which sacrifices of one kind or another are made by those undergoing the training.

4) In order to induce the talented persons to undergo these sacrifices and acquire the training, their future positions must carry an inducement value in the form of differential, i.e., privileged and disproportionate access to the scarce and desired rewards which the society has to offer.

5) These scarce and desired goods consist of the rights and perquisites attached to, or built into, the positions, and can be classified into those things which contribute to a) sustenance and comfort, b) humor or diversion, c) self-respect and expansion.

6) This differential access to the basic rewards of the society has a consequence the differentiation of the prestige and esteem which the various strata acquire.

7) Therefore, social inequality among different strata in the amounts of scarce and desired goods, and the amounts of prestige and esteem which they receive, is both positively functional or inevitable in any society".

Tumin argues that at the outset it is not proper to treat certain positions as functionally more important than others, e.g. it is not appropriate to judge that the engineers in a factory are functionally more important because of special skills than unskilled workmen. Surely, some labour force of unskilled workmen is as important and indispensable to the functioning of the factory as some labour force of engineers. Furthermore, relative indispensability and replaceability of a set of skills among a people largely depends upon the bargaining power of those who possess it. This power depends on the prevalent system of rating. Motivation is determined by several factors out of which rewards and other inducements are only some. There is also a likelihood that a system of norms concerning withdrawal of services "except under most extreme circumstances would be considered as absolute moral anathema". In such a situation, the notion of the relative functionality proposed by Davis and Moore would have to be substantially revised.

The second proposition regarding range of talent and the presence of limited number of individuals with talents is contested by Tumin on the ground that in any society there is no adequate knowledge to determine and judge the amount of talent present in society. He explains that societies that are rigidly stratified are less likely to be able to discover new facts about the talents of its members. "Smoothly working and stable systems of stratification tend to build- in obstacles to the further exploration of the range of available talent. This is especially true in those societies where the opportunity to discover talent in any one generation varied with the differential resources of the parent generation" (Tumin, 1953, rpt.1967: 54-55). If the differential rewards and opportunities are socially inherited by the subsequent generation, then the discovery of talents in the next generation becomes particularly difficult. More importantly, motivation depends on distribution of rewards in the previous generation. This means that unequal distinction motivation in a generation is because of unequal distribution of rewards in the preceding generation. Access to privileged position is restricted by the elites in society.

In the third proposition, Davis and Moore introduce the concept of sacrifice which Tumin (ibid) states is "the least critically thought-out concept in the repertoire, and can also be shown to be least supported by actual facts". He challenges the prevalence of sacrifice by talented people undergoing training since it involves losses that arise out of surrender of earning power and cost of the training. One of the basic issues here is the presumption that the training period in a system is essentially sacrificed. This is not always true because the costs involved in training people may be borne by the society at large. If this happens, the need to compensate someone in terms of differential rewards when the skilled positions are staffed become redundant as much as the need is stratify social position on these grounds.

Tumin argues that even if the training programme is sacrificed and the talent in society is rare, the fourth proposition of Davis and Moore suggesting differential access to desired rewards does not hold. The allocation of differential rewards is scarce and desired goods and services as the only or the most efficient was of inviting appropriate talent for to there position is itself questionable. The joy in work, work satisfaction, institutionalised social duty or social service also provide motivation for the most functionally important positions. This aspect has been overlooked by Davis and Moore.

In the fifth and sixth proposition, Davis and Moore classify rewards into three categories, those that contribute to sustenance and comfort, those that contribute to humor and diversion, and those that contribute to self-respect and ego-expansion. He draws correspondence between differentiation of prestige and esteem which various strata acquire and stratification as institutionalised social inequality. Tumin questions the allocation of equal amounts of the three kinds of reward for effective functioning of the stratification system could one type of reward not be emphasised to an extent that the others were neglected. He says that it is not possible to determine whether one type of reward or all three of them induced motivation. Societies emphasise different kinds of rewards in order to maintain balance between responsibility and record. Again, the differentiation in prestige between conformist or the deviation does not equate with distinction "between strata of individuals each of which operates within the normative order, and is composed of adults".

The seventh proposition of Davis and Moore focuses on social inequality among different strata in term of scarce and desired goods as also the amount of prestige and esteem they incur. These are positively functional and inevitable in society. Tumin (1953, rpt. 1967: 57) writes, "If such differential power and property are viewed by all as commensurate with the differential responsibilities, and if they are culturally defined as resources and not as rewards, then, no differentials in prestige and esteem need to follow".

Box 25.2: Dysfunctions of Stratification

Tumin (1967:58) proposed the following provisional assertions:

1) "Social stratification systems function to limit the possibility of discovery of the full range of talent available in a society. This results from the fact of unequal access to appropriate motivation, channels of recruitment and centers of training.

2) In foreshortening the range of available talent, social stratification systems function to set limits upon the possibility of expanding the productive resources of the society, at least relative to what might be the case under conditions of greater equality of opportunity.

3) Social stratification systems function to provide the elite with the political power necessary to procure acceptance and dominance of an ideology which rationalizes the status quo, whatever it may be as "logical", "natural", and "morally right". In this manner social stratification systems function as essentially conservative influences in the societies in which they are found.

4) Social stratification systems function to distribute favorable self-images unequally throughout a population. To the extent that such favorable self-images are requisite to the development of the creative potential inherent in men, to that extent stratification systems function to limit the development of this creative potential.

5) To the extent that inequalities in social reward cannot be made fully acceptable to the less privileged in a society, social stratification systems function to encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of a society and thus to limit the possibilities of extensive social integration.

6) To the extent that loyalty to a society depends on a sense of significant membership in the society depends on one's place on the prestige ladder of the society, social stratification systems function to distribute unequally the sense of significant membership in the population.

7) To the extent that participation and apathy depend upon the sense of significant membership in the society, social stratification systems function to distribute loyalty unequally in the population.

8) To the extent that participation and apathy depend upon the sense of significant membership in the society, social stratification functions to distribute the motivation to participate unequally in a population".

Davis, in turn, asserts that Tumin seeks to demolish the concept of institutionalised inequality. He offers no explanation of the universality of stratified inequality. While the interest of Davis and Moore lay in understanding why stratification exists in society, Tumin argues that stratification does not have to be. Evidently, they are addressing different issues. Further, Davis alleges that Tumin's critique suffers from confusion about abstract or theoretical reasoning with raw, empirical generalisations.

He defends his own position by stating that the chief concern was with stratified inequality as a general property of social systems involving high degree of abstraction. Again, Tumin's critical appraisal of the theory proposed by Davis and Moore is based on only one article conveniently ignoring other publications that answer several question raised by him. His own understanding and presentation of Davis and Moore theory is inadequate. This, in fact, is why Tumin's concept of stratification is inconsistent. Moore too explicitly states that Tumin has not defined social stratification clearly. This led him to wrongly assume that differential rewards and inequality of opportunity were the same thing.

Tumin (1953, rpt 1967: 63) guards his position on several counts summarized in the following words, "Of course, all institutional arrangements of any complexity are bound to be mixed in their instrumentality. It is the recognition of this mixture, and the emphasised sensitivity to the undesired aspects, which impels men to engage in purposeful social reform. In turn, social scientists have been traditionally concerned with the range of possible social arrangements and their consequences for human society. One is impelled to explore that range after probing deeply into whether a given arrangement is unavoidable and discovering that it is not. One is even more impelled to such exploration when it is discovered that the avoidable arrangement is probably less efficient than other possible means to the stated end. It was toward such further probing that I directed my original remarks".

25.6   The Rise of Meritocracy

Michael Young projects a future British society in which all the members were provided equal opportunity to realise their talent and that would determine social roles i.e. the most able people would occupy the most important position in society; social status would be commensurate with merit. This arrangement of role allocation came to be referred to as meritocracy. Young (1961) emphasises that meritocracy was completely dysfunctional in society. Those who occupied upper position by virtue of their merit would treat those occupying the lower positions with contempt, and as inferior them. This would happen because the people in important position would be absolutely convinced of their superiority, there would be no trace of self-doubt hence no restrain on their arrogance. Haralambos (1980: 37) explains Young's argument the following words, "Members of the upper strata in a meritocracy deserve their positions; their privileges are based on merit. In the past they had a degree of self-doubt because many realised that they owed their position to factors other than merit. Since they could recognise intelligence, wit and wisdom in members of the lower strata, they appreciated that their social inferiors were at least their equals in certain respects". As a result they would treat the lower orders with some respect. Meritocracy confirms that those in the lower rungs are inferior. They are hence treated with despise and arrogance. Those in the lower strata may resent it and take offence leading to conflict and tension between the ruling minority and the rest of the society. In corollary, those in the lower strata would be greatly demoralised because they would not be able to assign lack of opportunity to be successful as the cause of their situation, neither would they be able explain the success of others in terms of advantages of birth, influence, wealth and power. This would lead to loss of self esteem and of inner vitality.

25.7   Conclusion

In this unit, we have explored the concepts of difference and inequality in the larger framework of societies and social relationships. We identified the determinants of inequality and distinguished between natural and social inequality. Sahlins (1969) identifies three functional criteria of stratification: economic (referring to the extent of control over production, distribution, and consumption and the privileges associated with them), socio-political (referring to power and authority to regulate interpersonal affairs and impose sanctions on those who go wrong), and ceremonial (referring to access to the supernatural and in distinctive ritual behaviour).

The degree of stratification varies in different societies. Simple societies are less stratified than complex societies that are characterised by large number of social classes, ranks and groups differentiated on the basis of economic and socio-political criteria. All societies are, however, stratified to lesser or larger extent. Egalitarian societies (those in which every individual has equal status) are only theoretically real, for all societies do afford differences in status and privileges to some individuals. Social inequality, therefore, continuous to remain relevant in society and in sociological writings too.

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Unit 26

Class

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to discuss the

- sociological perspective on class
- interrelationship between classes
- movement between class positions

26.1   Introduction

Prior to the French Revolution, the term 'class' was used in a general sense as in the writings of Adam Smith, Madison and other scholars of the eighteenth century. Several of them used it interchangeably with 'group' or 'estate'. It was in the nineteenth century that class as a category came to be recognised as a relevant concept in explaining social theories, ideologies, social movements, social structure, and social change. The heuristic potential of 'class' was particularly important in the context of social stratification. In fact, class was identified as one of the most significant basis of stratification in society. Several sociologists have proposed theories of class structure and explained the phenomena of mobility between class positions. In this unit, we begin with the meaning and concept of class and class society and then explore the sociological perspective on class and the theoretical approaches crucial to understanding class and classless society in sociological writings. We also discuss the issue of struggle between classes and mobility between classes.

26.2   The Concept of Class

According to Ossowski (1967), the following three assumptions are common to all conceptions of 'class' society.

1) Classes constitute the most comprehensive groups in the social structure. While classes are differentiated groups in society, they are not independent of each other. It is not possible to speak of one class without reference to other classes.

2) Division of people into classes concerns social status connected with a system of privileges and discriminations not determined by biological criteria. This implies that each class is accorded certain privileges and discriminations that have a bearing on its social status. Now, the social

status, in this case, has nothing to do with sex or any other criteria that is biological in nature. Evidently, some classes are receive more privileges. They occupy higher status in comparison to those who receive more discrimination and occupy lower status. The differentiation and disparity constitutes the basis of social stratification and determines inter-class relations.

3) The membership of individuals in a social class is relatively permanent. This does not, in any way, rule out the possibility of transition from one class to another. What is stressed here is the fact that such transition is made by some individuals only. Often, one remains in a particular class throughout one's life.

Against this backdrop, it may be noted that while some classes are treated as superior on the basis of social status, privileges, and discriminations, others are treated as inferior. These socially relevant privileges and discriminations may be of different kinds. In a specific sense, however, the concern here is with wealth and power. This is notwithstanding the fact that Marx identified the privilege of exploiting other men's labour as the fundamental basis of class differentiation. Again, each class occupies a distinct place in the class hierarchy. The awareness of the place of one's class in the class hierarchy is referred to as class-consciousness. Class-consciousness is usually entwined with class interests and class solidarity. The other characteristic of class society is social isolation that refers to social distance and absence of close social contact between classes. One needs to understand that social isolation or lack of interaction between classes fosters class-consciousness and class solidarity that perpetuates class structure. In fact, Marx asserted that consciousness or awareness of class interest and feeling of class solidarity are the guiding basis of identifying a group as class. People belonging to a particular class exhibit distinctive behaviour and make use of specific vocabulary or pronunciation or speech. This implies that, among others, behaviour and speech also sets one class apart from another. These differences as also differences in access to wealth and power together with social distance and isolation of one class from another deepen cleavages between classes. As cleavages deepen and class distance increases, conflict in class interests emerges and conflict between classes becomes common.

There are two fundamental perspectives from which the concept of class may be understood. The first is the nominalist perspective that is identified with the American school of thought; the second is the realist perspective that is identified with the European school of thought. The nominalist perspective treats the class as an ensemble, a conglomeration of people who share common status. The emphasis is on the social status of each individual in terms of respect that others bestow on him/her. In the words of Aron (1969: 71), "Each person enjoys a certain position of esteem or prestige which results from the totality of situations in which he exists, and each situation can be analyzed from three points of view: in relation to property, occupation and power." Surely the place of an individual in the social domain is subjective and dependent on the judgment of the other people. There is, however, agreement on the notion that different individuals hold different positions in society. The position of an individual in hierarchy, as mentioned earlier, is a play of three elements: relations of property, occupation, and power upon which his/ her position is determined in the class structure. It may be understood as this stage that no single element determines the class to which an individual belongs. The emphasis rather is on the sum total of

social considerations. Individuals with similar prestige and status belong to one class. The realist perspective, on the other hand, treats social class as a real ensemble that is determined by material facts and by the collective consciousness of the people. Two ideas emerge from this approach. One is that a class is characterised by collective unity which is real, and the second is that people belonging to a particular class share collective consciousness.

Let us distinguish between the nominalist school and the realist school more clearly.

1) The nominalist school lays emphasis on individuals and interpersonal relations while the realist school lays emphasis on collective realities in explaining class.

2) The nominalist school postulates that people who have similar status or social prestige constitute a class. When social status changes, the class of a person also changes which means that it is easy to move from one class to another. There is no conflict between classes because the limits and boundaries of classes are not rigid and clearly defined, and more importantly classes are not associated with seizing of power. In simple terms, power is held and exercised by upper classes while the workers are never able to use it. The realist school, on the other hand, asserts that the conflict of power is inherent in relations between the classes. This is due to collective unity and collective consciousness of people belonging to each class. The people of a particular class seek to foster the interests of its own class that are often in conflict with those of other classes and in doing so each class tries to consolidate its own position in society.

3) The nominalist school upholds that the collective reality which the realists of boast of does not exist or hardly exists or, if it all, exists unequally while the realists school emphasises that by ignoring collective consciousness in explaining class, the nominalists have missed the essence of what constitutes the class.

The distinction between the American concept of class and the European concept of class proposed by Aron roughly corresponds to the hierarchical view of class and the dichotomous view of class proposed by Ossowski. The hierarchical view is associated with the nominalist position, and the dichotomous view is associated with the realist position.

Box 26.1: Denotation of the Term 'Class'

Ossowski (1967:90) identifies three meanings of the term class each of which has been used in sociological theories and in different accounts of the system of social relations.

1) "In the general sense each group which is regarded as one of the basic components of The social of the social structure may be called a 'class' of the social structure,…… In any case such a comprehensive concept includes both estate and caste, and also class in the second and third meanings distinguished here.

2) Of the two specifying versions of the concept of class that I should like to consider here, the first shows us a social class as a group distinguished in respect of the relations of property,…

.... Some caste or estate-systems can at the same time be economic class systems, but such a coincidence can only be empirically established. In cases where such a coincidence does apply one can speak of the "class" aspect of caste relation or the "estate" aspect of the class-system.

In a somewhat different meaning it is also possible to speak of the "class" aspect of an estate-system or a caste-system even when the coincidence does not occur, if we assume that between an estate-system and a class-system there holds some more or less complicated causal dependence...

3) In the second version specifying the concept of class, the class-system is contrasted with group-systems in the social structure in which an individual's membership of a group is institutionally determined and in which privileges or discriminations result from an individual's ascription to a certain group. In contradistinction to such groups of a caste or estate type, a class in this version is a group of which membership is not assigned by a birth-certificate nor any official document, such as a title of nobility or an act of manumission, but is the consequence of social status otherwise achieved.

The privileges and discriminations, which in this case require no sanction from any source, are not the effect but the cause of the individual's placement in the capitalist or proletarian class: one is reckoned among the capitalists because one possesses capital, and one belongs to the proletariat because one possesses no other source of income than the capacity to hire out one's labour".

26.3   Theories of Class Structure

a) The Classical View: Aristotle

Aristotle (1943) maintained that people are differentiated into three 'elements': one class is very rich; the other class is very poor. The third class occupies a position between the two in being neither very rich nor very poor. Those who are very poor feel too degraded and find it difficult to follow rational principle there is a possibly that they "grow into petty rogues and rascals". Those who are very rich are not willing to submit to authority. They also find it difficult to follow rational principle and are likely to grow into great criminals who commit offences from violence. The poor are not able to command so others often rule them. The rich are given to despising. They demand unquestioning subservience from others and make good masters. The people of middle class follow the rational principle and obey rules. They do not eye others' goods, others do not eye their goods; and they do not make plans against others, others do not make plans against them. They are free from factions and disputes. The presence of a large middle class ensures a well-governed state and safe democracy. Democracies are safer and more permanent than oligarchies because they have a large middle class that has a substantial share in the government.

When there is no middle class, the poor and the rich quarrel with each other and the class that is able to get an upper hold, regards political supremacy as the reward for victory. The result is that it sets up either democracy or

oligarchy that is geared to its own interests and advantage and not of the public rather than a just or popular government.

b) Capitalism and Social Classes: Karl Marx

Here we will critically discuss Marx's views on social classes. We begin with his perspective of social classes in detail and then go on to its critical appraisal.

i) Marx's perspective on social classes

Three periods in history are identified: ancient civilization, feudalism, and capitalism. Each period is marked by a predominant mode of production. Some of the predominant means of production identified by Marx are: primitive communism, ancient empires, feudalism, capitalism, and advanced communism. He clarified that class relations are characteristics of those means of production in which a section of population controls the means of production while others are excluded from it. Those who control the means of production exploit those who transform the means of production into finished products. The mode of production constitutes the basis of class structure. The capitalist or ruling class and the wage labour or the oppressed class makes up the class structure. In Marxian sense, a social class is an aggregate of people who perform the same function in the production process. These classes occupy different positions in the economy. The position that a person occupies in the social organisation of production determines the social class to which he/she belongs. The basic determinant of class is the way in which an individual cooperates with others in the satisfaction of basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Cooperation implies division of labour and organisation of production. Marx propounded that the first concern of human beings is to satisfy basic needs which forms the basis of production of material life. Once a need is satisfied, new ones emerge. Rising needs create new social relations. Social relationships enfold cooperation of several individuals. The relation between them is governed by struggle because the ruling class owns and controls the means of production. It also exercises control over the moral and intellectual life of the people. The entire law and governance machinery, art, literature, science and philosophy serve the interest of the capitalist class (or the bourgeoisie). This is typical in capitalist mode of production. A vast majority of Marx's writings are concerned with class relations in capitalism. In the capitalist mode of production, the raw material for production, the tools, the land and all that is necessary for production belongs to the capitalist class as its private property. Those who are actually engaged in the production process do not own the means of production. They work for the bourgeoisie by selling their labour, their ability to work, and their expertise for wages by which they subsist. They constitute the non-owning class, the wage labour, or the proletariat. The sale of finished products in the market fetches money that is more than the cost of production. This is the net profit to the capitalist class. It is often reinvested and in this way more and more profit gets generated for the capitalist class. Now, while the labour process and means of production (what Marx calls 'constant capital') does not change quickly, the labour-power (what Marx calls 'variable capital') is pressed hard to maximise the output so that more and more returns from finished products are accrued. 'Surplus value' is the balance between the investment in the labour process and the returns from it (that are appropriated by the capitalist class).

There is no denying that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the

proletariat is that of antagonism, hostility and strife since the capitalist class tries to exploit the wage labour class while the wage labour class tries to bring about an end to exploitation. Marx believed that class struggle was an important means through which social change could be effected.

Income, consumption patterns, educational attainments, or occupations are clues to the distribution of material goods and of prestige symbols. Income or occupation cannot be a determinant of class position because class is determined by the position of a person in the social organisation of production. Consider the case of two blacksmiths — one running his own shop, the other working in a factory. The two men belong to the same occupation but different social classes. Marx cited several conditions which were crucial for the development of social class: conflict over economic rewards, physical concentration of masses of people and easy communication among them, the development of solidarity and political organisation in place of competition between individuals and organisation for purely economic needs (Bendix and Lipset, 1967). It may be understood at this stage itself that the setting up of large industry brings together several people at one place. It is only natural that there will be competition between them. Common interest against their superior who exploits them for his\her advantage keeps, however, them united. They enter into strife with the capitalist rather than among themselves.

Workers are seen to sacrifice a part of their wages in favour of associations that are constituted of enterprising people representing the wage labour class who put up a strong resistance to exploitation by the capitalist. There is often the possibility that the association takes up a political character. Marx felt that the conflict between the workers and the capitalist class was not born out of struggle for economic advantage only. He emphasised the role of machine production under capitalism too. As machines made way into the production process, the social relations underwent major transformation and human beings came to be mere appendages of the machines. The machines did most of the work of men would only operate them. This deprived the workers of all opportunities to derive psychological satisfaction from their work. Marx referred to the lack of satisfaction as 'alienation of human labour'.

In the words of Bendix and Lipset (1967: 10), "Marx believed that the alienation of labour was inherent in capitalism and that it was a major psychological deprivation, which would lead eventually to proletarian revolution ….. Marx contrasted the modern industrial worker with the medieval craftsman, and — along with many other writers of the period — observed that under modern conditions of production the worker had lost all opportunity to exercise his 'knowledge, judgment and will' in the manufacture of his product". To Marx this deprivation seemed more significant than the economic pauperism to which capitalism subjected the masses of workers.

ii) Appraisal of Marx's Perspective on Class

Marx's ideas on class were subsequently re-considered by later writers many of whom were convinced that the reality of the system of exploitation gets obscured to a great extent in the course of everyday life. This is because in everyday life the process of exploitation is not always obvious and identifiable as it was in slavery or feudalism in which the slave or the serf who worked for the whole day for a meal to fill his belly or the serf who tilled

the land of his lord the whole day to be given a strip of land for his use, could see the clearly that the product of his labour was being kept away from him. The worker in the capitalist society who was given wages in return of his services (which was much less than the value of work the worker had produced) could not easily notice the process of exploitation. The other factor that obscures the reality of the process of exploitation in everyday life is that the ideas of the ruling class are reproduced and reinforced in newspapers, electronic media, schools, and other agencies. The working class accepts them innocently and unwittingly as obvious and part of common sense. Often the working class people do not see their situation the way Marx's theory projects. This has been the major reason for the lack of zeal in proletarian revolution.

Lukacs sought to demonstrate that left to its own devices, the working class would never fully understand the necessity of liberating itself through socialist revolution. It needed to be led by socialist thinkers. Louis Althusser blamed 'ideological state apparatuses' such as school and the media for reinforcing the idea that we are individuals in control of our own destiny among the working class people. This shadows the system of exploitation and the position of the working class as victims (Saunders, 1990). A. Gramsci refers to 'class domination' as 'hegemony' known more generally in Marxian theory as the dominant ideology thesis i.e. the existence of a powerful dominant class ideology that stresses the nature of private property and creates an acceptance of the whole capitalist social order among all classes. According to Giddens there are three main sources of class power: the possession of property, qualifications, and physical labour power. These tend to give rise to three-class structure: a dominant/upper class based on property, an intermediate/middle class based on credentials, and a working/lower class based on labour power. What Giddens laid out bears a relationship with the claim of Erik, Wright and Frank Parkin that class relations are determined by access to resources. Frank Parkin was chiefly concerned with the attributes such as race, religions, language and others that serve as the basis by which social collectivities seek to maximise rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited group of people whom they treat as eligible. Those who control the 'cultural capital' constitute a 'new class' referred to by Alvin Gouldner as 'cultural bourgeoisie'. The cultural bourgeoisie is in control of cultural capital wherein 'capital' is explained by Gouldner as any produced object that is used to make utilities that can be sold. The processor gets income or claim to income by virtue or the imputed contribution to economic productivity. Gouldner argues that these claims to income are enforced by modifying others' access to capital objects (Wright, 1985). By now, it is evident that there has been a fundamental and conspicuous shift from the thrust on exploitation as the basis of class relations in the capitalist societies to domination as the basis of class relations in the post- capitalist societies.

c) Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society: R. Dahrendorf

The second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed the legal recognition of joint stock companies in Germany, England, France and the United States. In the present day, joint stock companies have largely replaced the economic enterprises that were owned and managed by a capitalist or his\her family. The stock or the shares of a company are widely dispersed much in contrast to a capitalist set up in which the ownership lies in the hands of a single individual. In the post-capitalist era, the joint

stock companies afford far-reaching implications for the structure of industrial enterprises and for the broader structure of society of which social classes constitute an important component.

In the joint stock companies, the stockholders hold ownership, while the control lies in the hands of managers who are not like the capitalists. This arrangement keeps the owners away from the actual sphere of production and reduces the distance between managers and workers. This is the radical view upheld by Marx himself. The other is the conservative view that asserts that the owners (stockholders) and controllers (managers) are not widely different. They constitute a somewhat homogenous group. The stockholders and manages hold similar outlook and may be treated as similar to the class of capitalists. This view which comes out in the writings of C.Wright Mills (1954) stands out in sharp contrast to Marx's own analysis.

R. Dahrendorf (1959: 95) explained that the, "social structure of joint stock companies as well as co-operative and state owned enterprises differs from that of the classical capitalist enterprise, and that therefore a transition from the latter to the former is a process of social change". He suggested that the separation of ownership and control involved a change in the structure of social positions and also a change in the recruitment of personnel to these positions. This refers to the distribution of the roles of capitalist in two positions the owner, and the manager.

The owners are alienated from production process in the sense that they do not participate in the day-to-day affairs of production enterprise and do not have a defined place in the formal hierarchy of authority in the enterprise. This is so because the workers deal with and are answerable to the managers. It may be recalled that the capitalist exercised authority because he owned the means of production over which the subsistence of the workers depended. The managers on the other hand hold authority by virtue of the property rights delegated to them by the stockholders. Since the managers remain in contact with workers, they seek to exercise their authority with consensus of the workers or else the manual and clerical workers would make their interests felt in many complex and unregulated ways such as by disturbing the process of production significantly. The managers cannot afford to let this happen because the stockholders would reprimand them. Bendix (1956) explained that there are three kinds of entrepreneurs in the post- capitalist era, the capitalist, the heirs, and the bureaucrats. Thus, there is a definite change in the composition of the entrepreneurial class.

Dahrendorf maintained that capitalism has completely eroded and given way to different groups that bear a relationship with each other that is much different from the relationship between bourgeoisie and the proletariat highlighted by Marx. He outlined three effects of this development on class conflict: (i) when managers replace capitalists, there is a complete change in the composition of the groups participating in the conflict; (ii) change in recruitment and composition of the groups participating in the conflict leads to a change in the nature of issues that causes conflict; the managers who are like functionaries without capital do not act, behave and hold attitudes like the all powerful capitalists. Further the interests of the labour towards the new opponents are different; and (iii) the decomposition of capital (referring to differentiation in ownership and control of the means of production i.e. capital) involves a change in the patterns of conflict.

In the course of such developments, the capitalist class and the labour class cease to be homogenous classes. The labour also ceases to be homogenous class (there are unskilled labourers, semi skilled labourers, and skilled labourers, as also those equipped with different skills). The labourers who hitherto treated themselves as a single class with common interests and distinctive class consciousness now become increasingly aware of differences among themselves. This is referred to as decomposition of labour. The twin phenomena of decomposition of capital and decomposition of labour are almost inevitably accompanied with the emergence new middle class both within and outside the industry of modern societies. Lederer and Marschak coined the term 'new middle class'. In post-capitalist societies, the new middle class is constituted of salaried employees in tertiary industries, in commercial firms, in shops and restaurants, in cinemas, as also salaried skilled workers and foremen. The bureaucrats exercise authority and are positionally aligned with the ruling class. While it is true that bureaucrats do not constitute the ruling class, it is widely accepted that they are a part of it and in industrial, political and social conflicts they stand by the side of the ruling class. The other interesting fact is that a large number of salaried employees identify themselves with the interests, attitudes and lifestyles of the higher-ups.

The emergence of the new middle class has a profound impact on the class structure proposed by Marx. Dahrendrof suggested that the bureaucrats add to the bourgeoisie class while the white-collar workers add to the proletariat class. Both the classes become highly heterogeneous in composition, therefore, less united. Like the industrial workers, white color workers, have no property and no authority but they do exhibit many social characteristics that are entirely different from those of the working class. Similarly, though the bureaucrats do exercise authority that the older ruling class did too, they differ from the ruling class in several respects. Much more important than the decomposition of capital and the decomposition of labour, Dahrendorf explained is the question, whether the concept of class continues to remain relevant to the conflict groups of post-capitalist societies. Furthermore, the simplistic dichotomy in class structure in the Marxian framework no longer seems to be valid in explaining the structure and conflict in post-capitalist and advanced industrial societies.

d) Class and Status: Max Weber

Max Weber's major objection to Karl Marx's theory of class was the undue emphasis on the economic aspect. Weber did recognise the importance of the economic aspect of society but he did not rate it as the most important one. He said that specific life chances are created by the way the disposition over material property is distributed among some people who meet competitively in the market for the purpose of exchange. When we talk of disposition over material property, the focus is on owners only who get the monopoly to acquire valued goods while the non-owners are excluded from competing for highly valued goods. In acquiring capital goods and exercising monopoly over them, propertied people get an entrepreneurial function and the chance to share the returns on capital. The non-owners are without property and are able to offer their services, at best their labour while those who have property engage in price wars with them. Now, those who are without property are forced to get rid of their products in order to subsist. Weber explained that 'property' and 'lack of property' are the basic categories of class situation. Those who are propertied, for example, may belong to a

class of renters or entrepreneurs. Those who are without property are differentiated on the basis of services they offer. Thus, neither the propertied or the without property constitute a homogenous category. The former is differentiated on the basis of the kind of property that is usable for returns; the latter is differentiated on the basis of the kind of services that can be offered in the market.

In simple terms, Weber's concept of class has to do with the kind of chance in the market that affords a common condition for an individual's fate. Class situation, therefore, is market situation. It may also be noted that those people whose fate has nothing to do with the chance of using goods or services for themselves in the market such as the slaves do not form a class in the technical sense of the term. They constitute the status group. Weber emphasised that classes are not communities. They represent the basis of communal action (communal action refers to that action which is oriented to the feeling of individuals that they belong together). In Weber's own words (1946:251), "We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets". The three elements form the class situation that, in more comprehensive sense, is market situation. For Marx, class has to be understood in the framework of an individual position in the structure of production; for Weber class needs to be understood in the framework of the individual's position in the context of the market of exchange.

Other than class, Weber proposed the concept of status groups. Status groups differ from classes in being communities. In place of purely economically determined class situation, status situation assumes importance. Weber said that status situation is determined by social estimation of honour. This honour may be any quality that is shared by the people and held in esteem. Possession of property is not always associated with social honour and, is therefore, not essentially a qualification for acquiring status. Income, family background, education and all those criteria that are valued may be identified as markers of status. People belonging to the same status group may interact with each other on many occasions. Status order refers to the stratification on the basis of honour and lifestyle that characterise status groups. What is interesting to note is the fact that the status honour may be accompanied with honorific preferences such as the privilege of wearing special costume. Furthermore, artistic and literary activity connected with physical labour or used for income generation is treated as degrading work and not held in high esteem. The social honour associated with it declines tremendously. Weber maintained that often status disqualification operates against the performance of physical labour. In Weber's words, (1946, cited here from Bendix and Lipset, 1967: 27), "With over simplification one might thus say that 'classes' are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas 'status groups' are stratified according to the principle of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special 'styles of life'". He further explained that class and status groups are distinguished on another count. Class has a bearing with the market and individual's position in it. There is no order of honour or personal distinctions in the market that is the critical feature of status groups. The status order would get weakened if the same honour were bestowed on people who acquire economic power that bears the stigma of extra-status origin as to those who seek to acquire

status by virtue of their lifestyle. Status however, rises if economic power comes over and above the virtue of lifestyle. It is therefore only natural that those who uphold status order react with peculiar sharpness to pretensions of purely economic acquisition. Status is the predominant and preferable means of social stratification in conditions when acquisition of goods and distribution of goods is fairly uniform and stable. Stratification by status gets pushed into the background and stratification by class becomes important each time economic transformation takes place and technological repercussions set in.

In addition to stratification by class and status, Weber proposed the concept of party as the third element according to which society is stratified. The people who constitute a party are those who have a goal towards which they strive collectively and in a planned manner. The goal may be a cause i.e., a party may seek to realise a programme for ideal or material purposes or the goal may be 'personal' e.g. honour for the leader or followers of the party. Parties may exit in a social club as well. Their action is geared towards acquisition of social power by which is meant the potential to influence communal action.

The existence of a party in a state always presumes the prevalence of rational order and the presence of a staff of persons who are willing to enforce it. In a specific sense, parties may pursue interests that are determined through class situation or through status situation. They may even recruit members from them. They may not, however, be fully class parties or fully status parties. They may be neither of the two. Their means of attaining power may range from violence to canvassing for votes through social influence, bribes, public addresses, or even obstruction in parliamentary proceedings.

Reflection and Action 26.1

Compare and contrast Weber's and Marx's concept of class.

26.4 Class Struggle

As mentioned earlier, competition, strife, conflict, and struggle are inherent among classes in society. Marx propounded that inherent in the structure of classes was the identification of a common 'class enemy' as an entity against which all the members of a class would unite. If there was no class enemy, the people of a class would compete with each other fiercely and there would be no class solidarity or class cohesion. Marx maintained that when a large-scale industry is set up, scores of people come together in the search of avenues for subsistence. Naturally, they compete with each other on several counts. But, their common wages, common interest against their superiors, and other similar conditions keep them united and curtail competition among themselves. The capitalists on the other hand unite in the idea of repression. In the event of united capital, the working class forms associations. The interests that they define are class interests but the struggle of a class against another class is a political struggle. It may be appreciated that the conflict between classes is restricted to the race for economic rewards and resources. It also develops because of psychological suffering that accompanies alienation of labour.

As specialisation and division of labour set in, the labourer gets more and more alienated from the production process. This alienation gets initiated at the time when the 'capitalist represents to the single workman, the oneness and the will of the associated labor. It is developed in manufacture that cuts down the laborer into a detail labourer. It is completed in modern industry, which makes science a productive force distinct form labour and presses it into the service of capital' (Bendix and Lipset, 1966: 10). Marx explained that in a capitalist system, social productiveness, and development of production are carried out at the cost of the laborer. This is done through excessive domination over, and exploitation of the labourers. The labourer is reduced to an appendage of the machine, the work itself loses charm. Labourer loses the motivation to work to his fullest potential. The conditions under which he is made to work are not encouraging. All this is done to accumulate capital. As the urge of the capitalists to accumulate capital increases, the plight of the labourer worsens.

Marx was sure that class conflict under capitalism leading to revolution and consequent overthrow of capitalist class would establish the workers as the major agent of social change. He envisaged that over a period of time, social division would cease to exist and with that would also end the exploitation of one class by another. The change would take place when the dissatisfaction of the workers would convince them completely that capitalism needed to be overthrown and that the way to do it was revolutionary political organisation. The labourer has to emerge as a strong political power and collectively negotiate for power.

Marx's prediction of a proletarian revolution is based on the premise that capitalist society would affirm conditions that establish and consolidate the position of two main classes in society. The bourgeoisie would surrender human values in the "icy waters of egoistical calculation". The proletariat, on the other hand, working in the constraints of factory production given to object degradation that collapses family life, religious beliefs, and national characteristics. They would rise to regain humanity. This prepares conditions for revolution that would usher in a new social order in which the process of material production 'would be consciously regulated by freely associated men'.

Weber, on the other hand believed that relative control over goods and services (that constitute the groundwork for the conception of class), produces income, opens up the possibility of procuring other goods, provides social position, and provisions a certain style of life. Those in common class situation are often led to similar sentiments and ideas but not necessarily to concerted action (Bendix, 1974). Class organisation emerges when there is an economic opponent. Weber (1968) proposed that it becomes important to curtail the competition when the number of competitors increases with respect to the profit span. For doing this, one group of competitors adopts some characteristics of its actual or potential group of competitors. The characteristics are externally identifiable such as language, religion, descent, residence and others. Sometimes associations are formed with rational regulations. Over, a period of time, if monopolistic interests persist, competitors establish a legal order that limits competition through formal bodies. Weber refers to this as domination by virtue of constellation of interest. Monopolisation calls for constitution of a common front against the interests of outsiders and solidarity of those who constitute it. The organisation of the group in defense against the interests of outsiders brings

an end to further competition. The membership to the group is restricted to ensure monopoly; and participation is controlled to ensure solidarity. If the monopoly is rooted in law, and the government enforces restrictions, then it is easy to restrain the competition and exercise control over the members of the organisation. Weber referred to this as domination by 'virtue of authority'.

26.5 Social Mobility

By social mobility is meant transition of individuals from one position in the social hierarchy to another. Here, we restrict the use of the term to mean movement between class positions. The concept of social mobility pre-supposes that people's position in modern class societies is not determined and fixed by virtue of their birth in a particular class. That an individual has the option to make transition between classes is the very basis of social mobility. The movement from one class to another may occur either in the lifetime of an individual or over a span of a generation or more. When an individual moves from class to another in his/ her own lifetime (for example, a person who joins service as a clerk and through a series of promotions becomes the managing director of a company) the mobility is referred to as 'intra-generational mobility'. On the other hand, when mobility occurs between generations (for example, children carpenters or cobblers become accountants, engineers or doctors and take up higher social positions than those of their parents), the mobility is referred to as 'inter-generational mobility.' Mobility may be both upward (as when the son of a blacksmith adopts the profession of a charted accountant) or downwards (as when the son of a doctor becomes a typist).

Box 26.2: Social Mobility: Motivation Theory of Veblen

"Those members of the community who fall short of [a] somewhat indefinite, normal degree of prowess or of property suffer in the esteem of their fellow-men; and consequently they suffer also in their own esteem, since the usual basis for self-respect is the respect accorded by one's neighbours. Only individuals with an aberrant temperament can in the long run retain their self-esteem in the face of the dis-esteem of their fellows.

So as soon as the possession of property becomes the basis of popular esteem, therefore, it becomes also a requisite to that complacency which we call self-respect. In any community where goods are held in severality, it is necessary, in order to ensure his own peace of mind, that an individual should possess as large a portion of goods as others with whom he is accustomed to class himself; and it is extremely gratifying to possess something more than others. But as fast as a person makes new acquisitions, and becomes accustomed to the resulting new standard of wealth, the new standard forthwith ceases to afford appreciably greater satisfaction than the earlier standard did. The tendency in any case is constantly to make the present pecuniary standard the point of departure for a fresh increase of wealth; and this in turn gives rise to a new standard of sufficiency and a new pecuniary classification of one's self as compared with one's neighbours. So far as concerns the present question, the end sought by accumulation is to rank high in comparison with the rest of the community in point of pecuniary strength. So long as the comparison is distinctly unfavourable to himself, the normal, average individual will live in chronic dissatisfaction with his present lot; and when he has reached what may be called the normal

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pecuniary standard of the community, or of his class in the community, this chronic dissatisfaction will give place to a restless straining to place a wider and ever-widening pecuniary interval between himself and this average standard. The invidious comparison can never become so favourable to the individual making it that he would not gladly rate himself still higher relatively to his competitors in the struggle for pecuniary reputability" (Veblen, 1934:30-32).

It may be understood that in industrial societies, the rate of inter-generational mobility is significant. It is common to find children joining the workforce at a higher position than the one their parents attained when they started work. This happens because, industrial societies lay emphasis on formal qualifications at the time of recruitment. Children of working class parents often gain the qualifications before they set out to look for employment. Further, upward social mobility is more common than downward social mobility because the demand for unskilled manual labour has declined significantly in the wake of technological advancement and the shift from the need for industry workers to service that call for specialisation entail higher position. More and more children find that higher positions are open for them and that opportunities are much more abundant than those available to their parents. Movement across a short range of positions in the social hierarchy is more common than movement across a wide range. People usually find it possible to improve their position marginally than to improve it substantially (Saunders, 1990).

In the context of social mobility in America, Marx noted that the classes have not yet becomes fixed. There is constant flux of elements between them. Weber emphasised the non-economic forces and the desire for independence among the farm workers in the German economy. In fact, the emphasis on the role of non-economic forces and the differential social mobility of the Catholics and Protestants was the starting point of his thesis on the relationship between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. The writings of Marx and Weber greatly influenced Sorokin's study of social mobility in American, English and several other societies.

Sorokin stressed the extent and rapidity of the growth of new middle class of salaried employees in capitalist societies and concluded that large-scale intra-generational and inter-generational mobility occurs in occupational terms. More and more men were found to shift from manual labour non-manual forms of employment. He accepted that children seem to more likely to enter their fathers' occupational groups than any other and that mobility is more likely to occur between occupational groupings within the same class than between groupings in different classes. He maintained that membership of a social grouping consists of two elements, one is the relatively permanent and stable, the other is ever changing with entry into one occupation for a particular span of time then exit from it and entry into another one. Working class cannot be treated as an agency of social transformation for two reasons, (i) there is declining permanent element within the working class and the social democratic and communist affiliations are likely to be rejected by the expanding fluid element, and (ii) the revolutionary capacity of working class gets diminished, since it is made up those who are incapable of socially upward movement on the one hand and the calibre of its leaders on the other hand. Sorokin contents that the mobility rates and mobility patterns do not follow an identifiable design or pattern and even if proletariats

get the opportunity to be dictators, they would not be able to achieve much (Goldthorpe, 1987).

Lipset and Bendix upheld that industrialisation led to high mobility rates. What is more interesting to note is their observation that the overall pattern of social mobility appeared to be the same in the industrial societies of various western countries. This is better known as the Lipset – Zetterberg (or the LZ), thesis (Zetterberg was the co-author of the first paper in which this generalisation was proposed). Lipset and Bendix's study differs significantly from Sorokin's study in that it concentrated on movement from manual to non-manual occupations which they defined as upward mobility despite the fact that they were aware that some white collar positions are lower in income and prestige than skilled manual work. Another crucial study on social mobility in America was that undertaken by Blau and Duncan. They began the study with the assumption that systematic exploration of occupational status and mobility were important in understanding social stratification. They confirmed that the rate of mobility between blue-collar and white-collar occupations was only little among various industrial societies. Their claim was, however, that elite mobility in America was exceptionally high. This was perhaps due to high level of popular education in the United States and lesser emphasis on formal distinctions of social status. They also maintained that most men in America do not attain high occupational status but do get to improve their standard of living hence their social status by way of raising conspicuous consumption. Finally they noted, "The stability of American democracy is undoubtedly related to the superior chances of upward mobility in this country, its high standard of living and the low degree of status deference between social strata for these condition make it unlikely that large numbers of underprivileged men experience oppression, despair of all hope and become so dissatisfied with the existing system of differential rewards as well as with political institutions that they join extremist political movements committed to violent rebellion" (Blau and Duncan, 1967: 439).

Goldthorpe, Llewllyn, and Payne (1987) bespeak of three major theses on social mobility. The first thesis on social mobility is the 'counter-balance thesis' attributed to Westergaard and to Parkin. The counter-balance thesis proposes that opportunities for inter-generational mobility have expanded but these are countered by a decline in opportunities for intra-generational mobility. This has happened because of growing professionalism, bureaucratisation, and technical complexity in work. So, greater social mobility takes place inter-generationally. At the same time, there is lesser possibility of upward mobility in the course of an individual's working life. Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, and Payne contradict the counter-balance thesis through their findings based on older and younger cohorts in the sample. They concluded that it was not more difficult for younger group to work its way up after starting in employment than it has been for the older group. Avenues for upward mobility for the working class have increased due to wider educational opportunities. At the same time, none of the traditional avenues for upward mobility are closed.

The second thesis on social mobility is the 'closure thesis' attributed to Giddens, to Bottomore, and to Miliband. The closure thesis suggests that those who occupy the superior positions seek not only to retain them for their own selves and for their children but also to acquire control over the resources so that they are able to achieve what they want. This means that

social mobility remains confined to lower positions while higher positions are not open to its effects. Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, and Payne refute this claim after studying higher-grade professionals, administrators, managers and proprietors. They demonstrate that while only one quarter of them were born into this class, more than a quarter of them came from manual working class backgrounds. Thus, far from being closed to lower classes, the top class was found to be heterogeneous in composition.

The third thesis on social mobility is the 'buffer zone' thesis attributed to Parkin, to Giddens, to Bottomore and to Westergaard and Resler. The buffer zone thesis holds that the social mobility, in large part, is confined to skilled manual and routine clerical grades which often change places with each other but rarely move much higher and much lower in the system. This short range mobility is restricted to buffer zone which is constituted of manual-non- manual boundary restructuring longer range mobility which would lead to heterogeneous elements on either side. Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne suggest that if there is no buffer effect against upward social mobility, there could be one in the case of downward social mobility. There, is thus, a kind of one – way screen that allows upward mobility and restricts downward mobility flows (Saunders, 1990).

26.6 Classlessness

For long, class relationships have been recognised as an integral component of social structure. Their importance in regulating economic and political domains of life has been well accepted. In academic discourse too, much attention has been laid on the analysis of class and class relationships. Marx emphasised that the overthrow of capitalist class by the revolutionary working class, the abolition of private property and capitalism were the pre-conditions for classless society founded on equality of condition. He projected that once the capitalist class was overthrown, new ruling class now constituted of the proletariat would dismantle capitalism. This could be understood as the conception of 'one-class classlessness'. After this period of transition, the older conditions of production that lay at the root of class conflict would be done away with. It is then that class distinctions would cease to exist and the foundation for a classless society with free development of one and all would be laid. Here, any one social group would not monopolize economic and political power. This is the conception of 'total classlessness'. The third conception of classlessness is that of 'multi-class classlessness' in which equality and fragmentation of class structure exists simultaneously. Weber argued that there was no escape from bureaucratic domination. Socialism, he maintained would aggravate rather than eliminate the problem. Bureaucratisation does involve equality of treatment favouring the leveling of social classes privileges. The socially privileged, however, close opportunities for others. Weber discussed classlessness in terms of provision of equality of opportunities following bureaucratisation. At the same time he expressed reservations against the anti-democratic nature of bureaucratisation itself. While the opportunity to reach the highest position is available to all and the social and economic status of an individual is not determined by birth, everybody may not be able to make use of the opportunities that seem to be available to them in order to enhance their social position. This is the irony inherent in multi-class classlessness.

The three conceptions of classlessness discussed here, viz. one class classlessness, total classlessness, and multi-class classlessness do not ensure

the end of class as a relevant category of sociological analysis, for class is the commonly encountered reality in society.

> **Reflection and Action 26.2**
> Can there be a society without classes? Discuss.

26.7   Conclusion

In this unit, we have tried to understand the different conceptions of class beginning with the widest concept of class. It would be clear by now that sociologists have proposed different determinants and criteria for defining class. These range from the economic positions of a group of people to their position in the market situation. Underlying all the theoretical propositions is the understanding that classes constitute the most comprehensive groups in social structure, they are associated with a system of privileges and discriminations (Ossowski, 1967) and that there is scope of mobility between classes. The classes, therefore, cannot be defined as watertight compartments with rigid boundaries.

26.8   Further Reading

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Unit 27
Gender and Social Stratification

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit you will be able to

▢   discuss gender and stratification

▢   discuss the contribution of Marx and Weber to understanding of social stratification

27.1   Introduction

In most societies the tasks of women are clearly differentiated. In the West as well as in the middle class sections of Indian society, men have been seen to be the bread winners and women were expected to take care of the house and raise children. This arrangement used to be considered as 'natural' and complementary, having roots in the biological makeup of the sexes. The economic dependence of women and sexual division of labour were closely interlinked.

The ideology of 'naturalness' of division of labour has been challenged as women started entering the labour force in large numbers in the West. The rise of feminist movement in the west raised questions about division of labour and almost universal subordination of women across societies and cultures. The questions like has employment changed women's status? Are they facing double burden of performing jobs which are negatively valued. For example housework not being considered as work whereas paid work outside the household as work. Statistics show that women all over the world earn much less than men for the same work. Occupations are also segregated along gender lines. Other questions relate to women's active participation in work force, its consistent devaluation and women's exclusion from decision making. In understanding these issues we look for answers in the stratification theories.

Feminist scholars resist to treat the problem of women essentially an artifact of the contemporary system of economic exploitation. They have argued that the oppression of women is not to be seen as 'secondary' to class oppression as a whole. Women are oppressed as a class by men and patriarchal structures are geographically and historically almost universal. The major axis

of differentiation in prevailing society is not class but gender and it is women who wait for the 'longest revolution'. Gender in class stratification theories attempts to uncover the sources of structured inequality and social change. Both Marxists and Weberians have been engaged in empirical research which both document and attempt to explain the forms and structures of inequality. It has been widely criticized that the class situation of family members is 'derived' from that of the main breadwinner who is usually a man. The question of gender raises serious problem for both theoretical and empirical work in social stratification. The active participation of women in all walks of life, the decrease in the number of households that have only male bread winners, passage of new laws created an environment for women's location in social stratification. According to Newby (1982) the issue of gender inequality arose from women's movement.

27.2   Weber, Marx and Stratification

Weber observed that societies can be stratified according to their degree for class or status formation, providing the most important and basic fact of social stratification theory. The first form of inquiry concerns with the extent to which class or status systems are the predominant modes of social action at the societal level. Theories of social stratification then presuppose as their explanatory object the inter and intra-societal variability of class or status formations. At this time the question of sexual inequality treated in terms of division of labour (Marxist approach) which considers women as 'reserve army' i.e. The labour of women could be called upon to facilitate expansionary 'deskilling' clerical work as well as in periods of acute labour shortage such as in wartime. According to Max Weber economic and technological changes favour class stratification and pushes status stratification in the background.

Since the determination and explanation of the variability of class and status formation have been the central concerns of the study of social stratification, the documentation of the inequality of opportunities and outcome occupied a subordinate place. It was justified on several grounds. First, because of interest in the distribution of unequal rewards, life-chances and how different social arrangements could procure 'better' outcomes and opportunities. The second season was the importance given to the explanation of 'outcomes' of class or status differentiation, which were considered as by-product of stratification analysis. These approaches never gave serious thought to issues of gender inequality, because the emphasis was on class polarisation and status-group consolidation. Earlier it was always presumed that gender relations are usually heterosexual and therefore crosscut by class and status relations. It gave bearing on the view that gender relations are somehow similar to ethnic relations.

Box 27.1: Marx and Patriarchy

Marxist school of thought has led to the conceptualisation of sexual division in terms that have less to do with actual social relationship or patterns of social interaction, that with the determination of the 'place' of female labour within the class structure and of its 'functions for capital'. A major question arose from this perspective is whether or not female domestic has always had difficulties in formulating a stable and coherent theory of action which could relate the analysis of objective class position and of system contradictions to class formation. There was a fundamental difference from the kind of analysis that has accreted around the concept of 'patriarchy'

which refers to patterns of behaviour or forms of social interaction. Both Marxists and patriarchy approaches also differ on whether women constitute a class or not, while patriarchy is seen as a structure of social relations in men are privileged systematically and women disprivileged in such a variety of social contexts that it makes sense to think of gender relations as a form of 'stratification'.

Patriarchy constitutes a type of social formation that has been improperly ignored by conventional stratification analysis. According to Mann (1986) the omission of gender as a basis of social stratification created a crisis in stratification theory. The five main areas of stratification theory, which have been influenced by Gender, are individual, the family and household, the division of labour between the sexes, social class and nation-states.

27.3 Gender and Social Stratification in Cross-Cultural Perspective

The unequal accesses to resources, opportunities and rewards and to rights between men and women are legitimised by patriarchy across societies and cultures. Status inequality between men and women is not a new phenomena which is reinforced through patriarchy and its institutions, gendered division of labour and social institutions like marriage, dowry, property and inheritance and subordination. Sylvia Walby (1994:22-28) observes that patriarchy is not only differential distribution of power but also it is built into the very mechanism of production.

> **Reflection and Action 27.1**
>
> Write a note on gender in a cross-cultural perspective. Discuss your views with your friends.

Feminist sociologists working on the concept of class have challenged its basis solely derived from man's occupations. A major concern of feminist critique has been to consider what modification of class boundaries would be necessary if women in paid work are to be considered as well. Secondly they have sought to reevaluate the contribution of women's work to the family.

Cross cultural research on sexual division of labour attempted to describe wide range of women's productive activities in societies with different mode of subsistence but also the status implications of these on status of women.

For feminist anthropologists right from the very beginning the chief concern has been to explore the causes of universal gender inequality. They sought to explain its origin and perpetuation in terms of sociological, cultural and material terms. Each of these explanations rested upon a major dichotomy which was taken to be universal: public/domestic, nature/culture and production/reproduction.

In feminist anthropology, the relationship of gender with social stratification has been conceptualised primarily in the way gender informs social structures as a symbolic construct and as a metaphor for social action. Gender is conceptualised as symbolic representations and the behaviour of women and men and their relations. Anthropologists like Rosaldo, Lamphere and,

Ortner identified gender and kinship as the basis of social inequality whereby recognising how women's access to property and decision making etc. are subsumed within larger ideological, material and political contexts of kinship structures.

Ortner and Whitehead (1981) proposed a model of prestige structures which is defined as the set of prestige positions or level that result from a particular line of social evaluation, the mechanisms by which individuals arrive at a given level or positions, and the overall conditions of reproduction of the system of statuses(ibid..13).

Gender, they argued, is one such prestige structure, and in every human society, man and woman compose two differentially valued terms of a value set, men being men, higher (ibid..16). They suggested that male prestige is linked to 'public roles', such as chief or a Brahman, while female prestige is defined in relation to men, in such roles as wife, sister and mother, in other words female structures are encompassed within the male structures. Conceptualising gender as one of the prestige structures pushed the gendered analysis of social stratification across societies.

Anthropological literature suggests that women's work outside of household and in subsistence economy indicates as well as reinforce generally egalitarian relations between women and men. Women's in Vanatinai have access to power both through their control of the economic capital of land and through their accumulation of symbolic capital in exchange and mortuary ritual. But among horticulturists in highland New Guinea, women raise staple crops but men raise prestige crops that are the focus of social exchange.

Box 27.2: Division of Labour

This cultural valuation is the foundation for gender stratification that is then reinforced by gender ideologies of male superiority and a high degree of sexual antagonism between men and women. Meigs (1990) describes a "chauvinistic" ideology that is rooted in men's role as warriors. The division of work among Mundurucu, an Amazonian horticultural society, where men hunt, fish and fell the forest area for gardens while women plant, harvest and process manioc. Men work at Mudurucu has more assigned value. As Murphy and Murphy (1985) state "Male ascendancy does not wholly derive from masculine activities but is to a considerable degree prior to them". Male domination is traditionally symbolic. According to Martin and Voortries (1975) the decline in female participation in agriculture is that the female domestic workload tends to increase when root crops are replaced by cereal crop and when animal labour replaces manual labour.

Women's value is defined by their reproductive abilities rather than by their productive activities. Bride wealth is considered as compensation to the bride's parents or her kin for the productive and reproductive rights of the bride; dowry as a form of inheritance provides a bride with land and other wealth and helps her to attract a husband.

In traditional patriarchal Irish family (studied by Arensberg & Kimball (1940) work was divided by gender and age. The division of labour considered "natural" and power in the hands of men. Pastoral societies are also generally characterised by patriarchy and a dichotomisation of the sexes, both symbolically and socially segregation of the sexes and gender stratification

are fundamental attributes of many pastoral societies. Campbell (1964) who studied "Sarakatsoni of Greece" says that the life of pastoral 'Sarakatsoni' revolves around three things: sheep, children and honour gender ideology is embedded in these three valued items. The ultimate authority lies with the male despite the fact that female contributes equally in all aspects of life.

27.4 Status of Women

Generalisations are often made about the status of women according to different modes of adaptation but these studies show that great amount diversity persists. To understand gender stratification, the interlinkage of both ideology and participation in production must be understood. As Atkinson (1982: 248) states, "It is too facile to deny the significance of sexual stereotypes or to presume that women's influence in one context cancels out their degradation in another, just as we know that women's status is not a unitary phenomenon across cultures, we need to be reminded that the intra cultural picture is equally complex." Socialist feminist scholars, however, maintain that patriarchy precedes class inequality. They clearly show that new forms of subordination and gender asymmetry have superseded the old, leaving patriarchal control undisturbed. Industrial work privileged men who took control over the earnings and social power while leaving women as dependents.

Leela Dube, Eleanor Leacock and Shirley Ardener (ibid:xi) provide a cross-cultural perspective; focusing upon the insignificance and passivity of women and the primary of men in various societies. Leela Dube observes that making women invisible despite their obvious preference and effective visibility is the root cause of their low status in society.

Inequalities of gender can be explained by "gender regimes" which is a cluster of practices ideological and material, which in a given social context, acts to construct various images of masculinity and feminity and thereby to consolidate forms of gender inequality (Connell, 1994: 29-40). According to Kabeer (1995:37) 'biology is gendered as well as sexed'. Male and female are translated as man and woman based on mutually exclusive traits of masculinity and feminity.

Women are attached to a two-fold stratification i.e. in relation to men and in relation to other women. Gender structures different spheres of male-female inequality.

Many egalitarian societies in the contemporary world are characterised by a division of labour whereby men hunt and women gather. Friedl (1975:78) outlines four reasons for this division i.e. the variability in the supply of game, the different skills required for hunting and gathering the incompatibility between carrying burdens and hunting and the small size of semi nomadic foraging population. Despite the common assumption that men hunt and women gather, there is no sharp division of labour. The Tiwi, Australian aborigines who live on Melville Island off the coast of Northern Australia both men and women hunt and gather. Women are considered economic assets and a source of wealth and prestige for men. Women acquire social status and can be politically influential. Goodale (1971) suggests that Tiwi culture emphasises the equality of men and women in society. Among the Agta Negritos of North Eastern Luson, the Philippines women enjoy greater social and economic equality with their men compared to Tiwi of Australia. They

make significant contribution to the daily food supply and also control the distribution of the food they acquire, sharing them with their families and trading them in the broader community. This challenges the widely held notion that in foraging societies pregnancy and child care are incompatible with hunting. They have developed methods of contraception and abortion to aid them in spacing their children.

In horticultural societies, in which cultivation and farming is required by the use of hand-tool technology women play important roles in production. Lepowsky points to gender egalitarianism among the horticultural and matrilineal people of the pacific island of Vanatani. He says that the prominent position of women in Vanatinai exchange and other activities.

27.5 The Indian Context

According to Kalpana Bardhan (1986;94) "Although the family is the salient units of analysis for stratification studies, whether based on class or caste analysis, it is not quite sufficient situated within the broader framework, the division by sex and the status of women affect its properties of stability and dynamics".

Reflection and Action 27.2

Write briefly on patriarchy, economy, and class structure. Put down the main points in your notebook.

In Indian society, besides family as a basic unit of stratification the role of kinship, family and everyday relations, the role of male head of the family, status equality between men and women are some of the questions, which needs examination. Michael Mann (1986:40-56) discusses patriarchy, economy and class structure. According to Mann compartmentalisation of women persists despite involvement of women in politics, development programmes and processes and feminism. Indian society has been divided into *purushjati* and *stree jati*. To conceptualise women and write about them, Nita Kumar (1994:4) suggests four ways to deal i.e. by making women the object of human 'gaze' by seeing women as actors and subjects by giving them the prerogative of males, by focussing on the patriarchal, ideological discursive within which women exist and which seemingly control them without a chance to get out of them, by looking at the hidden, subversive ways in which women exercise their agency. She raises some questions like desirability of having women as subjects and to replacing of the masculine, rational, free subject into a feminine one.

According to Monisha Behal's (1984) work in Mainpuri district in west Uttar Pradesh, women's lives in the village are full of gloom and sadness because of work overload, bad health, drudgery and poverty. Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita (1984) pose the women's question by highlighting the incompatibility of Indian constitutional Law, violence, aggression and crimes against women. Mahatma Gandhi viewed that women has infinite capacity for sufferings because she is the mother of man has also been critically examined. Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi (1986) studied the Indian women in the context of interconnections between gender, caste and class. They explained that the patriarchal upper castes tightened both caste and gender division as they consolidated their economic supremacy and defended challenges to that supremacy.

> **Box 27.3: Women and Dalits**
>
> Status asymmetry of genders is part of the larger social structure which is reinforced through caste and family values. Gender and caste are important aspects of class exploitation. Women in the Indian society are stratified along caste, class, religious and ethnic boundaries thus no generlisations on the status become possible. Women are stratified. Women from Dalit sections, suffer from triple oppression — caste, class, gender.
>
> Divided by economic inequality and the ideology of hierarchy Indian women hardly share interests. It has been found that work is prime mover of women's status because there is a correspondence between economic stratification, social hierarchy and differentiation of female work pattern and employment modes. Caste oppression, class exploitation and gender inequities are more stable and durable as they are practiced within the family.

Women's movements in India have mainly focused on those issues which seem to cut across boundaries such as violence against women, work related inequalities, access to education and employment, health, social recognition of work of house wives and remuneration for their work, political repression and under representation, price rise etc.

Raising issues of exploitation and oppression in different spheres of life i.e. family, marriage, economy, religion and politics, feminists seem to cover a large vista of gender concerns in diverse Indian contexts.

In all kinds of writings it has been admitted that patriarchy, stratification system and status of women are closely inter-related and any kind of positive change in the status of women would be an attack on patriarchy and stratification system. Through a symbolic analysis unequal practices have been seen express deep seated cultural valuations of what it is to be a masculine and feminine. Leela Dube (op. cit.) discusses the relationship between man and women by using metaphoric concepts of 'seed' and the earth in various patrilineal cultures as justification of gender asymmetry.

Women in literary writings have been projected in a conservative form. In the last three decades large spate of writings on various aspects of gender inequality challenge the invisibility of women in economy, denial of unemployment, decision making and violence and crime against women as male privileges.

The abolition of landlordism and the breakdown of its socio– cultural milieus have affected women in a positive manner. Mencher and Saradamoni (1983:A –167) find that female income is essential for below poverty line houses. Most of the women are engaged in three types of work: (a) participation in the traditionally defined labour force (b) domestic work plus activities like alone. Even these women are victimized because of their sex and poor economic back-ground.

Karuna Ahmad finds (1979 : 1435 – 40) five trends in women's employment: (a) clustering of women in a few occupations (b) clustering either in low status occupation or in the lower rungs of the prestigious profession, (c) women receive lower salaries than men, (d) high proportion of highly educated and professionally trained unemployed women.

Studies suggest that women's professional locations reflect their position in society in terms of caste and class backgrounds and educational achievements. Perceptions regarding status among women are shaped by modern education than the traditional values regarding marriage and family.

Agnihotri (1996) and Agarwal (1984) gave preference for Marxist approach in analysing women. Agarwal proposes that a number of questions which would have a bearing on gender relations will get obfuscated in the organisation of production and relations of production. But despite the metaphor of reforms and individuation of women, emphasis on chastity, patriarchy, division of Labour, sacredness of Marriage seclusion with the household has persisted

27.6 Caste and Gender

The three basic characteristics of caste are:

i)   Exclusion or separation i.e. rules governing marriage and contact, which maintains distinctions of caste.

ii)   Hierarchy i.e. the principle of order and rank according to status.

iii)   Interdependence i.e. the division of labour which is closely tied to hierarchy and separation.

These three analytically separable principles of the caste system operate through units based on kinship. Women's lives are largely lived within familial parameters. The centrality of the family and household remains very important in their lives (Dube,1996: 1- 27).

Women's work contributes substantially to the occupational continuity of a caste group. significant continuities in the link between caste and occupation can be seen with respect to Brahmin is still acting as a Purohit (priest) for upper and middle level castes. Among artisan castes of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters and weavers, many are still using their traditional profession for their living and women are helping them directly or indirectly at all levels of work. Basket weaving is a joint activity of men and women. In rural areas and small towns it is common for women from households of petty traders and shopkeepers to grind spices and prepare fries, fritters and preserve for sale in the family shop. It is a fact that occupational continuity of a particular caste depends largely on women (ibid).

Jajmani relations, short-term contractual affiliation between artisans and service castes and land owners, cultivators and traders, and relations of exchange among occupational castes, a feature of many rural and semi-urban areas, function at the level of family. Both men and women render services and receive remuneration in case and kind for their work. We can see in every region of India there are specific 'Untouchable' castes whose women work as midwives: these women, along with the men of their caste, share the essential task of removing pollution of upper and clean castes. The bond or contract which ties labourers to their masters is understood to include the services of both the husband and the wife (ibid).

The necessity of continuing with occupational work is an important basis for marrying within the caste. Women's contribution to occupational continuity is carried out within patrilineal limits and under the impositions and controls of caste. A woman's education may also be restricted keeping the work demands and marriage market in mind.

In difficult times of the family, Scheduled Caste women generally do works of scavenging but not the men. It is held that since women are used to doing domestic work for their own household, can do similar kind of work for others. The men feel that it is below their dignity to do such works or jobs. Among migrant families, women are often the principle supporter of the family. But the controls are retained at this time also. Social and ritual matters are discussed and decided upon by the males of the caste with in the neighborhood (ibid).

Food and Rituals: Food constitutes a critical element in the ritual idiom of purity and pollution. The concern of purity and pollution centering on food begin at home. The prescriptions and prohibitions regarding food for women are governed by principles of kinship, marriage and sexuality. Women play key role in maintaining the sanctity and purity of home. Notions of safety relating to both purity/pollution and the 'evil eye' entail a variety of restriction and constraints on women in the tasks of processing, preserving, cooking and distributing food. In situation away from home and their locality men tend to be more relaxed about rules of commensality, in a similar context women are both chaperoned and watched over carefully and are expected to follow rules more strictly (ibid).

There is a pervasive notion that women never attain the level of purity of men of their own caste. It is well known that traditionally women of twice-born castes have been equated with *Shudras* who could not be initiated into the learning of the *Vedas* (ibid).

Marriage and sexual relations constitute a central arena in which caste impinges on women's lives. The cultural apprehension of the vulnerability of women and the emphasis on their purity and restrained behaviour which emphasises on limited interaction with opposite sex, are important components of management of female sexuality in a caste society. The strong patriliny in North India institutionalizes control of sexuality and fertility of women. In the case of an unattached woman, pregnancy is a disaster because in partrilineal society the issues of caste boundaries and her own purity are involved.

Growing up of a female child is marked by severe controls, idealization of familial roles, and emphasis on female modesty and strong value attached to virginity of female. Women are expected to retain the purity of caste at all life stages.

The pre-pubertal phase is looked upon as intrinsic purity stage and it is celebrated in a number of ways, like worshipping and feeding virgin girls on 8th day of Navaratri. This calls for restrained behaviour on their part and emphasises the need for protection and vigilance. In Indian society, restrained and controlled sexuality is a pre-requisite for socially sanctioned motherhood (Dube ibid). Even in urban areas middleclass women working in the public work sphere experience pressures to confirm to the image of 'good woman' and face sexual harassment.

The principles of sexual asymmetry underlie the relationship between caste endogamy and dowry, the different fates of men and women in inter-caste unions and the sexual abuse of women. Sexual mores and restrictions are less severe in case of 'lower caste' women. Men have mechanism by taking purifactory bath and the ritual expatiation of the offence to escape pollution

which occurs through sexual intercourse with a low caste woman, but the same is not accepted in case of 'upper caste' female, she is banished, declared dead to the family. Inter-caste marriages especially in rural India are still not tolerated and many cases of killing the couples have been reported in the recent past. Sexual violence against lower caste and tribal women is not an uncommon feature here.

M.N. Srinivas (1976: 90) has pointed out that in contemporary caste society cognate jatis tend to get telescoped to form a single entity for purposes of marriage caste both imposes constraints and creates the dominant ethos which underlie the practice of dowry within Hindu society. The increasing social and economic differentiation has increased the demand and expectation on the part of the groom's family.

27.7 Tribe, Gender, Stratification and Change

For long it was assumed that tribal societies were not stratified along caste and class in the Indian context and the gender relations were seen to be near egalitarian. Tribal Women's status was also seen to be much higher than the caste women since concepts of purity and pollution did not apply to them and women enjoyed considerable autonomy in sexual and marriage affairs. Despite women's major contribution to tribal economy, they were excluded from inheritance of property and political decision making. Recent literature suggest that tribal societies are changing at a fast pace. Colonialism, coexistence with caste groups, missionaries, industrialisation, education, political democratisation etc have influenced them to a great extent. Gender asymmetry which always existed in these groups has multiplied and become more complex due to import of outside influences and growing stratification based on wealth and power (Mehrotra, 2004). Gendering of politics and the state are other major areas of concern. Women's right to vote and the constitutional provisions for gender equality could not ensure women's active participation in the political realm and statutory bodies. Their exclusion from public decision making bodies is near complete. Gender inequality is inbuilt into state's seemingly progressive policies as highlighted by Swaminathan (1987,cf. Sharma,1997). She picks up Minimum Wages Act and the Equal Remuneration Act as well as policies for women's education and the Hindu Law of Succession. Women's movements in India have created a great deal of awareness and gender issues have come to the centre stage. Women's organisations raising questions of gender inequality and empowerment have been operational at both grassroots and other levels of Indian society, employing local strategies in resisting social and economic oppression (Mehrotra, 2002). National and international agencies have created spaces through NGO action in rural and tribal areas for economic as well social development. The much debated and practiced phrase women's empowerment has become the buzz word and a quiet revolution is taking place at grassroots level through women's active participation in development process. Agarwal (1994), however, notes that effective rights in land alone can empower women. Women's struggles are about bringing social transformation and emancipation from cultural bondage which keeps the stratification stable.

27.8 Conclusion

From the above discussion it is clear that a gender informs and organises social stratification as one of the organising principles like race, class, caste or status. Gender in interface with race and class determines the structure

of western society, whereas caste and gender enter into class laying down the structure of action for its members in the Indian context. The understanding of status implications in social life and everyday routine of men and women are symbolically represented in ideological and material aspects of society.

The question of gender and stratification is not to be understood in terms of inequality between men and women and in terms of subordination of women alone. Recent researches on masculinity also suggest maleness to be the symbolic construct as the femaleness is, reflecting that how gender as a cultural construct expresses the relational dimension rather than the individual attributes across societies and cultures.

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Unit 28
Theories of Origin of Caste System

Contents

28.1 Introduction

28.2 Definition of Caste

28.3 Theories of Origin of Caste System

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28.6 Conclusion

28.7 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit you will be able to

▫ give a definition of caste

▫ outline theories of caste as an institution

▫ describe the caste system over the ages

28.1   Introduction

It is perhaps true that the most frequently mentioned peculiarity of the traditional Hindu Society is the institution of caste, or as it more frequently called, the caste system.

The origin of caste is a subject, which has given rise to a great deal of speculation. The Indian caste system which is an age-old institution, even to it, there is no unanimity with regards to its origin. The caste structure is so complex that in spite of large number of researches done by social scientists no valid explanation with regard to its origin could come out.

This unit seeks to have a look at the various theories of origin of caste system; various definitions given by scholars and also the issue that how the caste system has sustained itself through ages; what all forces were responsible for its sustainability.

28.2   Definition of Caste

The word is derived from the Latin word 'Castus', which means 'pure'. The Portuguese word 'Casta' which means race, lineage or pure stock. But 'Caste' was not used in its Indian sense till the seventeenth century. The Indian use is the leading one now, and it has influenced all other uses. As the Indian idea of caste was but vaguely understood, this word was loosely applied to the hereditary classes of Europe resembling the caste of India, who keep themselves socially distinct. The Portuguese used this word to denote the Indian institution, as they thought such a system was intended to keep purity of blood.

On one hand the learner is used to describe in the broadest sense the total system of social stratification, peculiar to India, on the other hand, it is used to denote four more or less distinct aspects of this total system. i.e. varna, jati and gotra.

Careless use of the English word 'caste' has been the source of considerable confusion. Manu distinctly says that there are only four varnas, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra & there is no fifth varna, while he admits of over fifty jatis. Varna, according to Manu are four divisions into which the castes are grouped. But later scholars point out that even Manu confuses jati with varna. The confusion is due to the fact that the Brahmin can be called both a varna and jati.

According to Risley, "a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor; human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give opinions as forming a singly homogenous community. The name generally denotes or is associated with a specific occupation. A caste is almost invariably endogamous in the sense that a member of the large circle denoted by the common name may not marry outside that circle, but within the circle there are usually a number of smaller circles each of which is also endogamous". Ketkar defines a caste as a social group having two characteristics:

1) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born.

2) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. Each one of such groups has a special name by which it is called. Several of such small aggregates are grouped together under a common name, while these larger groups are but subdivisions of groups still larger which have independent names.

Box 28.1: Views on Caste System

Gait says that caste is an endogamous group or a collection of such groups bearing a common name who by reason of traditional occupation and reputed origin, are generally regarded, by those of their countrymen who are competent to given an opinion, as forming a single homogenous community, the constituent parts of which are nearly related to each other than they are to any other section of society.

Béteille has defined caste, 'as a small and named group of persons characterised by endogamy, hereditary membership and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system'.

M. Senart defines caste 'as a close corporation, in theory at any rate rigorously hereditary; equipped with a certain traditional and independent organisation including a chief and a council, meeting on occasion in assemblies of more or less plenary authority and joining together at certain festivals; bound together by common occupations, which relate more particularly to marriage and to food and to questions of ceremonial pollution, and ruling its members by the exercise of jurisdiction the extent of which varies, but which succeeds in making the authority of the community more felt by the sanction of certain penalties and above all by final irrevocable exclusion from the group.

Nesfield defines a caste as 'a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat or drink with any but persons of their own community.'

Majumdar & Madan define caste thus: "If a number of people constitute a group not because of physical togetherness but because they have some common interests and common ways to doing things, as a consequence of which stratification of society into higher and lower group emerges, then there groups may be called as status groups. It a status group is open to entry, that is, if anybody can become its member by fulfilling certain pre-requisite conditions, like obtaining a degree, or paying an admition fee, or earning a particular income, then the status group may be called a class. If the recruitment is not free, that is, if a status group is not open to any body, but only those are its members who have certain ascribed, attributes, which cannot be acquired by other, then it is called a caste."

Bougle, the French writer, concludes that the caste system divides the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups, distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics:

1) separation in matters of marriage and contact, whether direct or indirect (food);

2) division of labour, each group having, is theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only with certain limits;

3) and finally hierarchy, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another.

This definition indicates the main characteristics of the system.

Like the numerous definitions given by various scholars since decades there are numerous theories of origin of caste system.

28.3 Theories of Origin of Caste System

As is evident from the various definitions given above, caste in India is a social institution, deriving sanction from and intimately interwoven with the Hindu religion. Membership of a caste is compulsory and not a matter of choice. A person is born into it.

It is practically impossible for individuals to change their caste. Each caste boasts of a peculiar tradition of culture and tries to preserve it tenaciously. The customs by which it lives are generally different in some respects from those of any other castes and are sometimes in marked contrast to those of any other caste. The caste system provides the individual member of caste with rules which must be observed by him in the matters of food, marriage, divorce, birth, initiation and death.

Caste sanctions and strictures still govern all social, religious and economic activities.

Reflection and Action 28.1

What do you think are the most important aspects of caste. Read the entire unit before writing the answer in your notebook.

It is obvious that such a system of social stratification divides the society into thousands of small, hereditary and endogamous groups, each cluster of groups having its own distinctive sets of customs and practices, which together form a hierarchy, each such group of caste is associated with one or more

traditional occupations and is related to the other by means of an elaborate division of labour.

The caste system on which the traditional order of the Hindus society is based is believed to have been of immemorial antiquity. The complex nature of the caste structure is evident from the fact that, even after a century and a half of painstaking and meticulous research in the history and function of the social system, we do not posses any conclusive explanation of the circumstances that might have contributed to the formation and development of this unique system in India. As commented by D.N. Majumdar, there are today as many theories regarding the origin of the caste system as there are writers on the subject.

Census of India done in 1931 made references of the following five theroies with regards to the origin of caste. Hence, to simplify our endeavor we too would follow the same reference.

a) **The Divine Origin:**

It may be pointed out that most of the religious authorities, Shastra's and puranas have advocated the divine origin of the caste system. So, the general feeling among the Hindus is that it has been established by the order of God or at least by his wishes, and so it should be religiously followed. As per the 'Purusha Sukta' in Rig Veda, the people belong to four main castes (varnas) constituting the four body parts of the purush (the creator). The Brahmin was his (pursha's) mouth, the Rajanya (kshatriya) was his arms, the Vaisya was this thigh; and the shudra sprang from his feet.

This view has also been expressed in most of Dharma-Shastras, smirities and Puranas. Manu, whose pronouncement is vited as an authority, also supported this view. He further asserted that different castes arose as a series of crosses first between the four varnas and then between their descendants and also by degradation due to non observance of sacred rities. Besides , the book of Manu also contains reference to caste by the ten primeval rishis i.e. Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Prachetas, Vaisistha, Bhrigu and Narda. In the Mahabharta , divergent views have been expressed. In Shantiparva, Bhrigu has asserted that the world was created by Brahma and later on separated into castes in consequence of work. But in the Mahabharata it is stated that the Lord Krishna created Brahmins from his mouth, Kshatriyas from his arms, Vaisyas from his thighs and Shudras from his feet. In the Bhagwad Gita it is stated that the four fold division of castes was created by god according to appointment of qualities and duties.

b) **Karma and Transmigration:**

Then there is the theory of karma and transmigration of soul which seeks to justify the caste system. The various conditions of men, the highest, the middling, and the lowest are caused by karma. One's status in life is determined by ones action (karma) in past incarnations. Whatever a man enjoys or suffers is a result of his own actions. His bad actions would bear bitter fruit, whether they were done overtly or covertly. In consequence of many sinful acts committed by one's body, voice or mind, that individual in the next birth would become a bird, or a beast, or be born as a low caste person respectively.

Those who perform good karma pass into superior existence, and those who

lead an ideal life obtain nirvana from birth and death. Such being the idea of retribution and justice, not only one is dissuaded from bad life but he is also persuaded into a meritorious life by promise of absolution, of heaven, of expiration of sins of himself and also his ancestors. Thus even the most wretched man with his, most degrading occupation remains satisfied with the belief that the miseries of his present life, are the result of his sins in his previous life, and if he submissively performs his caste duties in this life he will be born in a higher caste in the next life.

Box 28.2: Formation of Castes

According to the Racial theory propounded by Herbert Risley (1915) in his book 'The People of India' racial differences and endogamous marriages lead to the origin of the caste system. According to him, caste system developed after emigration of IndoAryans from Persia where the society was divided into four classes—priests, warriors, cultivators and artisans and this they maintained even after coming here. They differed from the non-Aryans in culture and racial tracts. So in order to maintain their superior status they started practicing hyper gamy and imposed restriction on 'Pratiloma' marriages.

Risley (1915) described six processes by which the castes might have formed. They are enrolment of tribes of aboriginal in the range of Hindusim either under their own tribal designation or under a new caste name, occupation as the chief factor in the evolution of caste, change in original occupation leading to subdivision of the caste which ultimately developed into separate caste, development of new caste due to neglect of established ceremonial practices, tendency of certain groups to preserve by gone traditions more rigidly, and the sectarian type who started life as religious sects.

Kroeber (1930) supports racial factor but he also regards religious, cultural and occupational factors as significant.

Ghurye (1932) has described the caste system as Brahminical system and believes that the conquered non-Aryan race becomes the shudras who were debarred from religious and social activity of the Aryans.

Majumdar (1957) believes that clash of culture and contact of races led to social groupings. He also believes that three superior classes assigned particular occupation for their members and to maintain their superior status, debarred other people from practicing such occupations. This led to hierarchical caste system.

Thus it appears that the racial factor has been accepted by most of the scholars but still it cannot be taken as the only factor in the development of the caste system.

European writers on the subject of caste origins knew about the racial difference between castes, high and low, and consciously and unconsciously linked their findings to race. Weale wrote that the whole history of India, form the earliest times, had been one long story of colour prejudice and that more cruelty had probably been displayed there than in the rest of the world, believed that the Aryans races who were 'white' simply devised the iron system of caste to prevent the under mixing of a dominant race with a 'black' inferior race.

W.J.Thomas finds marked physical contracts in the population, correlated with superior and inferior cultures and this according to him is the basis of caste distinctions.

Dudley Buxton thinks that caste is still of assistance in dividing up the complex races of the Indian peninsula.

Gillin thinks that it is possible that caste in India originated in the racial differentiations between various populations,

MacIver also leans towards the theory of the racial origin of caste structures. He says that caste perhaps arose but of the superimposition of one endogamous community on another, religion and pride of race which such a superimposition must have engendered.

The colour questions in the formation of caste has also been considered. The colour question at the root of the varna system is apparent from the word verna, which means colour.

The class, which retained utmost purity of colour by avoiding intermixture normally, gained precedence in the social scale. The status also depends upon the extent of isolation maintained by the social groups. The Brahmins were white, the Kshatriyas red; the Vaisyas were yellowish and the Shudras were black as described in the Mahabharta. The three higher varnas have tried to maintain their claims to superior status by keeping to themselves the important professions.

Karve, however does not accept the view that the original meaning of varna was 'colour'. She argues that in the early scanned literature and in grammatical works varna meant 'class'. Karve continues that 'at a later time the word varne to mean 'colour' and the fourfold division of the ancients was then taken to be based on physical feature, namely colour.'

The social factor in the formation of the caste structure, in a sense, admitted by most of the scholars and yet the development of the caste system cannot be explained wholly on the basis of race.

c) Occupational Theory:

Occupational theory propounded by Nesfield (1885) advocates occupation as the lone factor for the development of this system. According to him, before this system priesthood was not the exclusive monopoly of Brahmins. But later on when hymns and rituals became more complex, a section of people got themselves specialized and became the Brahmins. Due to importance of sacrifices such people came to be more respected. Later they made this occupation hereditary. After this other sections of people also organised themselves for securing privileges. They did this in self-defense and also in imitation of group of people whom they held in high esteem.

> **Box 28.3: Ranking and Caste**
>
> Different occupations grouped together men from different tribes into castes, which then borrowed the principles of endogamy and prohibition of commensality from the customs of the old tribes and thereby solidified themselves into isolated units. The ranking of any caste as high or low depended upon whether the industry represented by the caste belonged to an advanced or backward stage of culture and thus the natural history of

human industries afforded the chief clue to the gradation as well as the formation of the Indian castes. Thus the castes following the most primitive occupations like hunting, fishing, basket making etc were regarded as the lowest, the metal workers, agriculturalists and readers were higher in rank, while the highest caste was of those who were priests and teachers.

Slater in his book, 'Dravidian Elements in Indian Culture' emphasises the fact that caste is actually stronger in southern than in northern India and suggests that caste arose in India before the Aryan invasion as a result of occupations becoming hereditary and marriages being arranged by parents within the society of the common craft because sexual maturity developed early and trade secrets were thus preserved. As a result of magic and religious ceremonies also, exclusive occupational groups were built up, marriage outside which became prejudicial and contrary to practice. The Aryan invasion had the effect of strengthening a tendency to associate difference of colour and of strengthening also a tendency for castes to be placed in a scale of social precedence. He also maintains the existence in the pre-Aryan society of Indian of an order of priest magicians.

Denzil Ibbetson explains caste as arising from a combination of tribal origins, functional guilds and a 'levitical religion' and lays great stress on the tribe the turning point in the career of a tribe comes when it abandons its wild and romantic life and adopts a particular occupation as its principal method of economic subsistence. This is the guild stage in caste history, and is common at some period or other of economic progress to all peoples in the world. The formation of guilds of occupational groups naturally led to recognition of skills and importance of the various guilds. In medieval times, the guilds vied with one another for predominance in accordance with their economic status exercising various degrees of pressure on the social life of the country. The exaltation of the priestly guild was soon followed by the priests insisting on the hereditary nature of their occupational status, and this led to the formation of endogamous units, as more and more of the guilds wanted to conserve the social status and privileges they enjoyed and to secure these permanently for the members of the guild. Later various other guilds followed suit and a hierarchical organisation established itself.

Chappel and Coon trace the origin of castes to the absorption of aboriginal types, and they also explain the formation of new castes with reference to the emergence of new occupations.

d) Tribes and Religious Theory:

From very early times, there has been a gradual and silent change from tribes to caste. This change has taken place in a number of ways, and it is believed that most of the lower or exterior castes of today were formerly tribes.

Risley has mentioned four processes by which the transformation of tribes into castes is effected. The processes are:

1) The leading men of an aboriginal tribe, having somehow got on in the world became independent landed proprietors, managed to enroll themselves in one of the more distinguished castes.

2) A number of aborigines embrace the tenets of Hindu religious sect and becoming Vaishnavas and giving up their tribal name.

3) A whole tribe of aborigines, or a section of tribe enrolling themselves in

the ranks of Hinduism, under the style of a new caste which, though claiming an origin of remote antiquity is really distinguishable by its name from any of the standard and recognised.

4) A whole tribe of aborigines, or a section thereof, become gradually converted to Hinduism without abandoning their tribal designation. Risley mentions the case of the Bhumij of Western Bengal, a pure Dravidian race, who lost their original language and now speak only Bengali. They worship Hindu gods in addition to their own (the tendency being to relegate the tribal gods to the women), and the more advanced among them employ Brahmins as family priests. They still retain a set of floristic exogamous subdivision closely resembling those of the Mundas and the Santhals, but they are beginning to forget the totems and the names themselves will probably soon be abandoned in favour of aristocratic designations. The tribe will then have become a caste and will go on giving up its customs that are likely to betray its true descent.

To these four process, Majumdar has added a fifth in which an individual member of an aboriginal or semi-aboriginal tribe adopts the surname and gotra of a particular caste, manages to enroll himself as a member of that particular caste and gradually intermarries with the members of that caste. His wealth and influence attract members of the caste he aspires to belong and thus in the long run he may establish himself as a permanent member of that caste. Cultural contact with Hindu castes leads to the adoption by the tribes of Hindu beliefs, rituals, customs and to participation in Hindu festivals and attendance at Hindu temple.

The process of gradual evolution from the aborigines to a higher class Hindu is a main feature of social evolution in India which government offices have noticed and commented upon it.

Bhuiyas present an excellent example of how from the aboriginal state, caste or group differences and distinctions arose gradually as men disclaimed earlier association and claimed new importance to themselves both divine and social. Similarly, there is a great parallel between the Munda social organisation and the Hindu organisation of 'gotra' and 'varna'. The Mundas are now found in certain parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, where they are known under three different names, the Mundas, Santhals and Hos.

The Santhals are divided into 12 main septs of which the trace of one sept only could not found. Most probably the lost sept has become completely brahminised or Kshatriyaised and their descendents are not likely to give out their secrets.

e) **Family and Marriage:**

This explanation given by Senart (1930) holds that the principle of exogamy is the main basis of Indian caste system. In his opinion caste is the normal development of ancient Aryan institution which assumed a peculiar form because of peculiar conditions in India like prohibition of marriage within one's gotra, pollution by touch with lower classes, prohibition of inter-caste dining etc. He has presumed beginning of caste system in the form of varna division to the Indo Iranian period because of four-fold division of society in the Rig Vedic India.

Risley mentions that the invading Aryans displayed a marked antipathy to marriage with personas of alien black race and devised an elaborate system of taboo for the prevention of such union. But intermarriage could not altogether be prevented.

28.4 Caste System Through Ages

Rig Vedic society was basically tribal in character. According to Keith, the Vedic Indians were primarily pastoral, and this holds good for the Aryans known from the early parts of the Rig Veda. The Aryans encountered the urban population of Harappa society and ultimately conquered them in war. Social adjustment between the Aryans and survivors of Harappa society and other people naturally led to the rehabilitation of some of the surviving priests and chiefs into corresponding positions, possibly of inferior nature in the new Aryan society. Early literature throws hardly any light on the process of assimilation between the Aryan commoners and those of the survivors of earlier societies. It is likely that most of them were reduced to what came to be known as the fourth varna in the Aryan society. In essence, the Rig Vedic Aryan society and perhaps the society described in the Atharva Veda, was characterised by the absence of sharp class diversions among its members, a feature, which is usually found in early societies. The Shudras appear as a social class only towards the end of the period of the Atharva Veda.

The Aryans, white skinned, good featured, making sacrifices and worshipping gods like Agni, Indra, Varun etc were distinguishable ethnically and culturally from the Dasyus, who were black skinned (*krishanthvach*), flat nosed (*anas*), of unintelligible speech (*mridhravach*), not sacrificing (*ayajnan*), worshipping no god (*adevayu*) and following strange customs (*anyavrata*).

Reflection and Action 28.2

Provide an outline of the various theories of caste. Which one do you favour? Write your answer in your notebook.

Gradually the Daynrs, instead of being exterminated were taken as slaves. 'Das' became in the later literature synonymous with slave and the people were employed in menial jobs. It is most likely that Dasyus (slaves) and Shudras were originally the names of prominent tribes conquered and reduced to slavery by the Aryans. By the time the Purusha Sukta was composed the Dasa slaves of the Aryan conquerors had begun to be called Shudras. The idea of ceremonial impurity of the Shudras involving prohibition of physical and visual contact with him appeared towards the clos of the Vedic period (1000-600 B.C.) The first notice of such a marked degradation is found in the Satapatha Brahamana.

Around the 600 B.C.—300 B.C., the difference between the Vaisayas and Shudras was getting narrower day by day. The occupation of the two castes were practically interchangeable. The Vedic society now advanced from tribalism to feudalions. The proud higher castes — Brahmin and Kshatriya began to adopt a more exclusive policy towards them. The social position of Shudra underwent a change for the worse. Shudra ceased to have any place in the work of administration. The lawgivers emphasised the old fiction that the Shudra was born from the feet of the God and thus imposed on him numerous social disabilities in matters of company, food, marriage and education. The idea that food touched by the Shudra is denied and cannot be taken by a Brahmin is first expressed in the Dharmasutras (500B.C.-300

B.C.). Shudra could not take part in Vedic sacrifices and sacraments. He came to be excluded from the Vedic sacrifices to such an extent that in the performance of certain rites, even his presence and sight were avoided.

It has been said that the origin of untouchability may be traced back of pollution. Untouchablility may be traced back to pollution. Untouchability has its origin in both hygiene and religion. Finally the idea of untouchability has been traced to the theoretical impurity of certain occupations.

Sharma thinks that one of the reasons for the origin of untouchability was the cultural lag of the aboriginal tribes, who were manly hunters and galherens, in contrast to the members of the Brahminical society, who possessed the knowledge of metals and agriculture and were developing urban life. Gradually, Brahmins and Kshatriyas withdrew more and more from the work of primary production and tended to be hereditary in their positions and functions. The Nishadas, Chandalas and Paulkasas, the earliest mention of them is found in Yajurved. Out of there chandalas and Nishadas were considered as untouchables in later Vedic Society. In Dharamsutras and Pali texts Chandalas are clearly depicted as untouchables and the Vedic texts kept the fifth caste altogether out from the four-fold division of society. During this time the Varna divided Brahminical society was undermined by the activities of heretical sects and the inclusion of foreign elements such as the Bactrian Greeks, Sakas, Pathans and Kusanas. Manu desperately tries to preserve Brahminical society, not only by ordaining rigorous measures against the Shudras, but also by inventing suitable geneologies for the incorporation of foreign elements into varna society. In order to assimilate numerous aboriginal tribes and foreign elements Manu made a far greater use of the fiction of Varnasamkara (intermixture of varnas) than was done by his predecessors. In the majority instances the mixed castes were lumped with the Shudra in respect of their hereditary duties gives a list of Jatis, many of whom have changed in name and some of them have ceased to exist. He distinguishes the following categories:

a) four original varnas

b) castes, which were supposed to be produced by mixtures with pure and mined castes

c) castes which have lost their status on account of neglect of sacred rites

d) castes due to the exclusion of persons from the community

e) slaves and their descendants

f) people excluded from the community of four Varnas an well as their descendants

Manu mentions the old mixed castes, who are said to have originated from the intermixture of the varnas and ascribes a similar origin to a long list of mixed castes resolve themselves into three types:

a) castes produced from different pure castes;

b) those produced by the mixture of pure castes an one side and mixed on the other;

c) and those produced from parents of mixed origin on both sides.

Manu also advocated that higher castes should avoid all contact with the Chandalas and Svapakas. Chandalas and Svapakas should live outside the villages, their sole property consisted of dogs and donkeys; food vessels used by

them would be discarded forever. Manu goes further that if a Brahmin had contact with a Chandala or Antya, he would fall from his Brahminhood.

The advent of foreign people served to loosen the shackles of the varna system. The law books of the Gupta period retain the distinction between the Shudras and untouchables. During this period there seems to have been not only an increase in the number of untouchables but also some intensification in the practice of untouchability. Fahien (AD 399-414) informs that, when the Chandalas enter the gate of a city or a market place, they strike a piece of wood to give prior notice of their arrival so that men may know and avoid them.

After the death of Harsha (AD 647), Sind came under the occupation of the Arab in A.D. 712 and since then Muslims continued to come to India as travelers, traders and mercenaries. From the 11th century onwards, Muslim invasion with cold-blooded murders, forcible conversion, looking and devastation of the countryside, breaking up of Hindu idols and desecration of Hindu temples began in India on a large scale and the Indians experienced perpetual insecurity. For fear of their culture being submerged under the impact of new forces, the Hindus framed rigid rules against inter-marriage and inter-dining. The principle of hereditary came into prominence by 1000 A.D. Pratiloma and anuloma marriages were discouraged. The position of Shudras improved. There was improvement in their economic condition but intellectually they remained rather backward, because higher education was largely restricted to the elite— the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas.

With continuous Muslim invasions, there was considerable effect on the Hindu social system. In 16th century, there was further hardening of the caste system by early marriage to prevent religious conversions. The Portuguese occupation of some part of India in early 16th century gave rise to fresh conversions of Hindus into Roman Catholics. In medieval India, with resurgence of Hinduism by Sankracharya (788-820 A.D.) the Muslim and Christian convert freely got reconverted into Hinduism. Further Vaisnavaites and Saivaites devotees a during this critical period, held the torch of Hinduism. Various Bhakti movements by Acharya Ramanuj, Madhavacharya, Vallavacharya, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, Tulsi Das and Many other did help check Islamisation of India. Many converts came back to Hindu fold.

By the time British consolidated their position in India, the Hindu social system had accumulated many undesirable features. The various policies of the British rulers were geared mainly for the maintenance of law and order, for the collection of taxes, and for keeping an unrestricted market for British goods. Their centralised administration completely disrupted the old economy of the country. The old village economy which, for long, remained unaffected by the political conflicts and which had given so much strength to the caste system, became disrupted under British rule. The land policy created a new class of landlords and above million in to the ranks of tenants and agriculture labourers.

The caste divided Hindu society which ensured employment and protection to its various caste groups, could not effectively challenge the British policy. For the first time caste system faced a serious challenge from its foreign rules.

Western education and social reforms, brought abolition of untouchability. These movements had an aim of cleansing the Hindu social order of some of its undesirable features, narrowing down the caste distinctions, changing the attitude of high caste people towards the untouchables. Growth and town, establishment of industries in urban areas, introduction of railways, led to relaxation of caste prejudice new economic activities taken by the state gave birth to numerous non caste occupation. A process was set into motion, which began to attack the importance of caste as ritual cum-occupational division of society. The establishment of evil and criminal courts robbed the caste system and the caste panchayats of authority they once had even the members of particulars castes.

But the same time the British policy was not for fostering unity and cohesion of the various section of people of India. Its policy was directed towards dividing and sub-diving. People at whatever level possible be it religion, region, language or caste. Introduction of separate electorates or special recognition accorded to non-Brahmins castes in the south not only contributed to the disruption of whatever solidarity India once possessed and fostered jealousy between provinces, creeds, also hardened the caste distinctions.

Thus we see that the process of continuous adjustment and wider integration was always at work. It is clear from the above discussion that caste system becomes more and which rigid over centuries. The forces which led to origin of caste are also the forces, which led to sustainability of the caste system as such.

28.5   Caste: Not an Isolated Phenomenon

Social institutions that resemble caste in one respect or the other are not difficult to find elsewhere. The caste system has survived in a perfect form in India than elsewhere, but Hocart shows that the Indian caste system is not an isolated phenomenon as it is thought to be.

Comparable forms, still exist is Polynesia and Melanesia and that clear traces of them can be seen in ancient Greece, Rome and Modern Egypt.

Hutton finds analogous institutions, which resemble caste in one or other of its aspects in various parts of the world like Ceylon, Fiji, Egypt, Somali, Rnada and Urundi in modern Africa and Burma.

Ghurye traces elements of caste outside India like Egypt, Western Asia, China, Japan, America, Rome and Tribal Europe.

In ancient Persia there were the Atharvas (priests) Aathaesthas (warriors) Vastriya fshuyants (cultivators) and Huitis (patricians). The only important difference lay with regard to fourth class, which was the artisans class in Persia, and the servile or Shudra class in India.

In Western Roman Empire, there were occupational hereditary groups as created by the theodisian code. Such groups would have been created only if there were elements of social segregation in the society.

In Sweden, in the 17th century, marriages outside the class were punished. According to the German law the marriage of a man belonging to the high mobility with a woman is not entitled to the rank of her husband nor is the

full right of inheritance possessed by her and her children. The upper caste Muslims namely the Sheikhs, Saiyads, and the Pathans are intensely cautious of their lineage and avoid weaving marital relations with the low caste muslims like Ansaris and Julahas.

28.6 Conlusion

We have come to realise that the major theory of the origin of caste is rooted in the hindu myths and legends. The religious texts accord divine origin to the caste system in India. Interestingly, it is believed that birth in a high caste is, in fact, a reward of good deeds performed in the previous birth. Most people belonging to upper castes seek to arrange marriages within their own caste so as to maintain their superiority.

28.7 Further Reading

Srinivas M.N. 1962 *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*, London, Asia Publishing House

Lerner, Daniel 1958, *The Passing Away of Traditional Society.* Free Press of Glencoe

Unit 29

Theories of Modernisation and Modernity

Contents

Learning Objectives

After having read this unit you will be able to,

▫ define Modernisation

▫ outline approaches, implications, and phases of Modernisation

▫ discuss Modernisation in India

▫ describe the phenomena of modernity

▫ outline the approaches to modernity

29.1   Introduction

The theories of Modernisation inform us about how the various parts of the world developed into industrial powers. The approaches/theories that describe and analyse how and why this happened are the subject of the initial part of this lesson. Thereafter we will turn to modernity and see how a presentation and analysis of the same helps our understanding of modern western society as also the social processes witnessed in some Asian societies. Thus Modernisation is an outcome of various social processes. The major events in this historical development began after the IInd world war and these include the emergence of America (US) as a superpower in the globe which had the result of trying to styme the rise of communism. To bring about this aim of 'containment ' the US invested greatly in the strengthening of the economic base of certain countries including Western Europe, South Korea and Japan. Modernisation also stems from the growth of the communist movements in China Vietnam, Soviet Union (now no longer existing as a communist bloc) and Cuba. The third of these processes include the factors of decolonialisation in Asia and Africa and the termination of colonies controlled by European powers.

At this point of time the former colonies had to face the challenge of adopting some appropriate model of growth. In this they were assisted and helped by the US which sent vast teams of social scientists to study the

ground situation in the new nations states. The idea behind this move of the US was to see how capitalist ideologies could be used in the economic growth of these nations most of whom were poor due to the long period of colonisation which had greatly debilitated their resources and has been deeply exploited. This included the export of raw materials which were turned into products and commodities and reexported to the colonies so as to make great economic profits. This strategy of supplanting capitalism and capitalist ideologies was no doubt also an attempt to the influence of communist ideology and to destroy it over a period of time. There is thus a great dimension of political maneuvers and ideology which is involved in the process of Modernisation. Thus the scholars in all fields of social science studied these societies and their findings began to be published soon after the IInd world war. The main tools of analysis and of subsequent published included primarily the evolutionary theory and secondly the functionalist theory. Let us describe these approaches now so that the overall process of Modernisation begins to be clear. Thus evolutionary theory and theorists pointed out the several factors which comprised the view point of this approach found social charge in these societies to be in a linear progression going from primitive to complex society. This was held to be so in all societies. Again this theory and the theorists associated with it held that such linear progress of societies was leading to a better world and represented the good of humanity and civilization at large. Further social change was envisioned as a gradual occurrence and was dissociated from any sudden and violent chain of events eg revolution. Change was slow and steady and not sudden and violent as the communist ideology upheld. This slow change considering the situation of modern societies was felt to take enormous spans of time running in to centuries, not just decades. Thus the functionalist theorists, foremost of whom was Parsons, built up various tenets to promote its view point the main ones being the analogy of society as being an organism which had various interrelated segments in societal institutions. In this organismic entity (society) each of the various institutions performed a particular part which contributed to the whole. This theory propagated that there were four main functions which the institutions performed. These were the functions of - (a) adaptation to the environment performed by the capitalist economic system. Then was the function of. (b) goal attainment which was a government function a function which encompassed liberal aims(Rojas 1996: p1). Next came the function of integration performed by legal and religious institutions, specifically the Christian religion. Finally there is the latency function performed by the family and by educational institutions.

29.2   Approaches to Modernisation

Thus Modernisation approaches distinguished between traditional societies and modern societies. Thus the traditional societies were such that they tended to have a large personal, face to face nature which was felt to be inferior in terms of market relations. On the other hand modern societies tended to be neutral and therefore much more capable of dealing with and exploiting the market and the environment.

One of the key institutions in the society is the family and the nature of this differed again in traditional and modern societies. Thus the family in traditional societies was responsible for many functions. That is to say it is multifunctional and covered issues of religion, welfare, education, reproduction also emotional scaffolding. On the other hand the modern family which the functions of the family are now the domain of the state.

In this theory social disturbances occur when any of the parts of society begin to malfunction or to fail to deliver what was expected of it to maintain the status quo. Disturbances include peaceful / violent agitation, revolution, guerilla warfare and now terrorism. However there is a disturbing side to these activities because any individual / institution that provokes the state and the status quo is deliberately and often violently desisted and resisted for doing so. These actions are deliberately viewed as action which is humanitarian. The question of human rights is a recent phenomena and organisations have be instituted to ensure that democracy is not violated at the cost of middle level disturbances whether by groups or by institutions.

Box 29.1: Mc Donaldization

If we equate formal rationality with modernity, then the success and spread of the fast food restaurant, as well as to the degree to which it is serving as a model for much of the rest of society, indicate that we continue to live in a modern world...

While there may be other changes in the economy which support the idea of a post industrial society, the fast food restaurant and the many other elements that are modeled after it do not. (Ritzer 1996, sociological theory. P:579).

Smelser's point of view differed somewhat from what we have been pointing out. He took as his point of attention the effect of the economy and related institutions on the overall social structure. He pointed out that in Modernisation process society developed from simple technology to complex ideology. Further this was a movement away from subsistence to cash crops so far as agriculture is concerned. Again Smelser indicated that machine power begins to dominate pushing aside simply human (physical) labour. Finally there is an emphasis on urbanisation and urban structures rather than development of the rural areas. Smelser however was realistic enough to realise that these developments were not simple and linear but that these processes took place at the same time (together) but not at the same rate (Smesler, 1969).

Also such changes would occur at a different pace at different social structure and societies. In other words there was not one single trajectory towards social change because the traditions were varied in different societies. They therefore provided different kinds of challenges. Similarly Rostow published a theory of Modernisation which took the terminology of aviation and proposed various stages of development.

This theory talks of a primitive society moving on to get preconditions for the pre "take – off" onto the "take- off stage", the drive to maturity and finally to a mass consumption society. Thus for Rostow (Rostow, 1960) economic development goes through various stages and that this is universal to all societies, and that Modernisation is a process of homogenisation, of Europeanization, irreversible progressive, evolutionary and transformative. This theory has some questionable implications. Thus following this theory it is implied that the nations which are traditional have as their ultimate model western advanced societies which they must emulate in every way to themselves reach an advanced state/modern state. This in itself implies that the capitalist state and ideology is the path to be followed by the under developed states. Thus Modernisation and theories explaining it accept

without hesitation that American policies of trade and foreign policy, and that of international relations have to be accepted and subscribed to because they are at the core of the modernising process.

29.3 Implication of Modernisation Theories

As you will have noticed that there is a heavy western bias in these theories and their implications. Modernisation theory itself is mostly a western product and sets up these societies as an ideal that the less developed countries must follow without hesitation including capitalist ideology because this ''works'' and works best. However dependency theory takes a wider global perspective. It points out that the problems faced in development are not just those of social structure in traditional societies but in large part due to world wide structures imposed by the Western world, or the North.

Reflection and Action 29.1

Do you think that the "metropolis-satellite" relationship between countries of north and south still exists? Give reasons for your answer.

Thus Andre Gunder Frank has pointed out that relations between North and South are arranged as a chain described by him as "metropolis – satellite" relationships. Thus we can see that there is an underlying hierarchy in world relations (Foster-Coster, 1985). At the top of the chain is the metropolis (US) that has no strong dependence on other regions. We then go on to the strong dependencies but are dependent on the USA (or other well developed Western societies) for aid or any other kind of help. The downward chain continues and culminates right down to states (nations) which are very highly or even totally dependent on the nations higher up in the hierarchy of dependencies for almost everything in food, fertilizers, clothes, automobiles, machines etc.

According to Frank such dependencies become a problem when a State wants to develop itself economically and socially. Thus such moves often call for sanctions against the satellite states by the metropolises on which the satellite is dependent. This means also that dependency of this sort stems the freedom to chose by the satellite states, and to try and evolve in their own way because whatever they have by way of economic wealth is consumed by the nations higher in the hierarchy.

This theory is readily witnessed in international relations and the aid to the third world by the North have the most exploitative terms and conditions, which ensure that the satellite states can never be free of the donor in economic terms. Frank opines that the dismantling of such relations can alone lead to development along the lines that the third world nations want. Thus dependency theory is opposed to Modernisation theory, but it is definitely an alternative explanation. Further such an explanation exposes some harsh realities of contemporary societies across the globe. Modernisation theory is more of an ideology whereas dependency theories exposes the harsh economic international realities. Neither of them has produced any specific development just attributable to them. It may be noted however that Modernisation has since the 17th century has had an affect, beginning with the Western countries, impacted all over the globe. To give an example let us turn to the field of communication. Thus Modernisation theories shed light on how the media is affected by these relatively recent changes both in relatively traditional and postmodern societies we may note that the

Modernisation theories we have been discussing can be seen to have evolved in three relatively distinct phases. The first phase of these theories began in the 1950s and 1960s and tried to explain how Western styles of living gradually spread all over the globe (world). These was also a spread of technological innovations and the ideology of individualism.

29.4 Phases in Modernisation Processes

- The economic aspect where the mass media helped to spread technological innovations that were at the core of Modernisation.

- Cultural development including education and literacy rates. This too was aided by the mass media which can promote modernity.

- Identify development especially a rational identity was also helped by the media including the process of nation building and elections.

However a basic shortcoming of these approaches to Modernisation was their Western bias. Now the second phase of Modernisation was linked to critical theory that held away in the 1980s. These theories are in fact a critique of the western impact of Modernisation. Thus according to the media dependency theory there was a dependence of the developing countries on the mass media of the western world. That is to say the peripheral countries depended upon the core. Now we come to the third phase of the development of Modernisation theory beginning in the 1990s. These theories attempted to be neutral in their approach. Thus according to Giddens modern society (Giddens, A. 1991) and culture is marked by time space distantiation and disembbeding features or characteristics. Thus while traditional society involves much face to face interaction by those living in proximity to each other in modern cultures and societies the space across which interaction occurs using mass media. Thus the disembedding process such as currency, symbols, the internet and english language all help bring the North and South into a clearer focus. We now term to another area of Modernisation which has its presentation and analysis based on work in India.

29.5 Modernisation: The Asian Syndrome

Yogendra Singh points out at the beginning of his analysis that prior to Modernisation the traditions of India were based on the various principles of hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence. These were the basic aspects of tradition. These factors to some extent existed also in the traditional west. However as Singh notes Indian and Western tradition were in fact divergent to each other. This arose specifically from their own differing historical background their specific social and cultural heritage and overall social situation. Singh asks whether despite these differences would it lead to a universal model of Modernisation? Singh distinguishes between social change perse and Modernisation. Social change as such need not necessarily imply Modernisation. However the changes which were ortho-genetic and hetero- genetic were pre-modern. Thus the Islamic tradition in India was heterogenetic and was established by conquest. Thus endogenous change in Hinduism were confined to Sanskritisation. This in itself was based on a historical process which took many generations and was positional alone not structural. Modernisation in India commenced with its contact with the west which brought about vast changes in the Indian social structure. However it cannot be said that all contacts led to Modernisation. In fact Singh notes that in the process of contact with the west certain traditional institutions

also got further strengthened. Thus as Singh notes it would be misleading to think of a clear polarity between tradition and modernity, and he feels this is more theoretical than actual.

> **Box 29.2: Changes in Traditional India**
>
> The changes which thus occurred were confined to differentiation within the framework of traditional social structure and values; structural changes were way few, and those which took place were limited in respect of the type of roles ….Similar development in religious role structure and organisations partially followed the emergence of other traditions. But these changes by no means could be called structural, since differentiation of roles was segmental and did not alter the system as a whole. (Yogendra Singh, 1986, *The Modernisation Of Indian Tradition:* p:193).

During the British period Modernisation was selective and sequential. It was not in synchronisation with family caste and village. These areas were not of much concern by the British, more so after the revolt of 1857. British administration felt that these structures were not dynamic and were autonomous, especially the village and caste system. Caste was considered in the army and beaurocrasy, and in the national movement of a communal electorate was introduced. Singh feels these factors influenced the post colonial Modernisation process. The process of Modernisation found expression and ground in the freedom struggle of India led by Mahatma Gandhi whose actions and mobilisation of the masses led to what Singh calls a new political culture of Modernisation. However, Gandhi was not able to avert the partition of the nation into two because the historical background of Islam and Hinduism was different.

Singh asks how Modernisation can lead to an integrative pattern which is rather a complicated one whether this is overt or convert. How can a society avert a structural breakdown. From here on in the answer we are on familiar ground (discussed earlier in this unit) as Singh turns to the main theories of Modernisation, that is the structural and the evolutionary theories of Modernisation. These approaches have been adequately discussed earlier and we will not repeat them again. The student can at this point go back to the beginning of the unit before reading further.

29.6   Modernisation Process as a Whole

In this analysis Singh now turns towards a discussion of Modernisation as a whole. He points out that Modernisation did not lead to institutional and structural breakdown because of the characteristics of society in India. One of these characteristics was the political structures. Further the caste system itself was also independent of the political system. Thus the various which village areas had their own councils (panchayat) through which they attempted to solve village level problems. This type of inter structural independence was a great facilitator of Modernisation, but as pointed out earlier did not lead to societal breakdown. Thus Singh notes that modernity developed as a sub-structure and sub-culture rather an over arching entity. Over time however this segmental presence of Modernisation became 'encompassing' and the structural autonomy was no longer the prime 'shock-absorber'. Again changes in political systems made this pervade on society and stratification cultures. In its wake there are stresses on the entire cultural system. However it is clear that Modernisation requires adaptive changes in value systems which are non traditional in terms of values and

norms. Singh gives the example of the process of secularism and untouchability which are definitely part of the Modernisation process in present day India which is resisted by the traditional value system (Singh, 1986).

Reflection and Action 29.2

To what extent does Modernisation lead to the breakdown of inequality? Give reasons to support you're your answer.

Singh asks again whether society in India be able to avoid "structural breakdown" in what he refers to as the "second phase" of Modernisation? Further the absence of the structural autonomy creates serious problems or "bottlenecks" for the transition to modernity? Thus Singh opines that in the cultural area legislations have altered the overall landscape since they have been made with a view to terminate social inequality and its attendant exploitation and alienation, and pave the way towards democratic rights and other commitments made in the constitution of India. Such processes have pushed society in India away from the positional changes of Srinivas's theory of Sanskrilisation. In place of this process these has been a creation of new identifies, caste associations and tribes. This process in itself is speeded up by the Great Traditions of Modernisation eg education, industrialisation and urbanisation. Further Singh notes that traditional structures are being mobilised for modern objectives and protest movements. Paradoxically tradition itself is strengthened because media and transport processes spread ritual structures, and help organise further the various religious groups and activities. Again religious sects and other religious groupings employ the bureaucratic approach and this is in part responsible towards the integration of sects from the overarching religious order. However Singh is careful to point out that in the post colonial period of Modernisation there have been several structural changes. Thus caste, family, village, and community retained their traditional identity. Caste especially has been witnessed to be extreme fluid and adaptive to new situations and has in no way been abolished so far as the ground reality is concerned. Further caste has adopted to the modern era in India by involving itself in many different areas such as democratic participation, politics and trade unionism, and is tenacious in its persistence more so in the area of joint family groups.

Modernisation in the colonial era was relatively homogenous in the elite structures. Thus the elite from industry, military and politics came from a background in caste and class stratum. These elite had access to modern education and had similar ideologies. It is clear then that the base for such elites was fairly delimited. In the post independence era this narrow base has increased. The result of this that there is a differentiation between the elites themselves, broadly the political and the non political elite. Singh points out that the political elite is less Westernized and identify much more with traditionality and symbols related to it. Singh also notes that the federal structure of a one party system has given way to a multiparty system, with the subsequent divergence in ideologies. Further the income created by the various FYPs has mainly benefited those who are already rich rather than the poor, especially rural masses. Thus the attempt to plan has accentuated the divide between the rich and the poor. Again the fast rate of growth in population has itself created structural tensions. Thus till recently the industrialisation process India remained what Singh calls a 'rural-peasant' type of society, except for pockets such as the metropolitans of India of which there are few in India.

These structural inconsistencies arise therefore from a variety of sources; these are:

- Democratisation without appropriate civic culture
- Bureaucratisation without universalistic norms
- Growth of the mass media.
- Aspiration growth without increased resources and distributive justice.
- Stress on welfare ideology only at the verbal level.
- Over urbanisation without inadequate and proper charges in the social strata.

Singh cites Gunnar Myrdal according to whom nationalism and democracy have grown in an uneven way in Asia. In western societies an independent state, effective government and adequate law enforcement proceeded nationalism and democracy. In contrast in South Asia this was not the case and therefore this imbalance also created a economic dependence on developed countries. It also meant slow economic development and extremely tardy changes in institutions.

In India especially with a larger percentage of intellectuals and middle classes which are important for a real democracy, Modernisation did not proceed unimpeded. As Myrdal notes the "soft-state" approach meant a serious blow for social change which can be "circular" or "cumulative". Myrdal does not subscribe to evolutionary stages of growth which he feels is a teleological and conservative ideology. Thus the Modernisation process in India is moving towards a critical phase. However Singh is of the view that these stresses and contradictions will not lead to institutional breakdown. He feels that a 'constant coordination of Modernisation' is absolutely essential for a democracy based Modernisation in India. He is also of the view that Modernisation is not a single monolithic process and can and does differ from one society to another.

29.7   The Phenomena of Modernity

Let us now turn to a related concept and a related process to Modernisation viz. the phenomena of modernity. Thus the term modernity is a term employed to discuss the stage of a society that is more developed than another society. This term is usually employed to describe a society that uses world wide capitalism as the model to overall world development. Thus when a society is has the characteristics of modernity it is named a modern society. On the other hand the process of becoming a modern society is called Modernisation (as we have seen earlier). The defining features of such modern societies is:

- Emergence of nation state
- Industrialisation and capitalism
- Rise of democracy
- Heavier dependence on technological innovation
- Attendant urbanisation
- The overall development in mass media

In western Europe some of the defining features include:

- Renaissance and enlightenment

- Reformation and counter reformation
- French Revolution and American Revolution
- The Industrial Revolution

Many attempts have been made is sociology to try and define modernity. Some of the factors used to define modernity include:-

- Disenchantment of the world
- Rationalisation
- Mass society
- Secularisation
- Democratisation, and so on

Thus modernity is often contextualised by comparing modern societies to pre or post modern societies. This in itself creates some problems in terms of being able to define modernity. This is especially difficult when we try to construct a three stage model from pre modern to modern, and then onto post modernity. The features we have noted is a movement from somewhat isolated communities to more large scale integrated societies. In this sense Modernisation could be understood as a process which is not unique to Europe alone.

Box 29.3: Cultural Crystallisation

One of Germay's leading social philosophers in the Adenauer period following the second world war, Gehlen (1963) proposed the theory of "cultural crystallisation" to describe the modern situation. According to Gehlen in a famous phrase, "the premises of the Enlightenment are dead, only their consequences remain". In his view the institutional complexes of modern society have separated themselves from cultural modernity which can now be discarded… cultural ideas are no longer able to produce the "new" that was central to modernity (Genard Delanty 2000, *Modernity and Postmodernity*, p:73).

Thus large scale integration implies that there is a vibrant economy which reaches out to all parts of a nation state. This in itself is possible when mobility in the society has increased. Further these developments imply specialisation with is a society and linking up of sectors. However these processes can sometimes appear to be paradoxical. Thus a unique local culture loses its identity by these increasingly powerful influences of cultural factors eg. Folktales, popular music and homogenisation of cultures, food recipes. These factors are found to exist in a greater or lesser extent in all local cultures, and helps to diversify them. This is found to a greater extent in the metropolitan towns where mobility is higher.

Thus bureaucracy and hierarchical aspect of governments and the industrial sector are the areas which grow in power in an unprecedented manner. However the role of the individual still exits in such a society where there is dynamic competition and individualism, both exist side by side. This is then quite different from societies where the role of the individual is ascriptive. That is to say the individual in modern societies is influenced by more than family background and family preoccupations.

Now it is necessary to point of that such social changes are found at different

levels of social integration, and are not simply the features of European society at any particular point of time. These changes can happen when two communities merge together. Thus when two individuals develop a relationship the division of roles also tend to merge. Again in the process of globalisation we find the international flows of capital change the ground situation. Thus while it can be said that modernity has some apparently contradictory elements in reality these can be reduced to several simple concepts related to social change.

How then does this view of modernity explain the world wide influences of West European and American societies since the Renaissance. Initially, we can say that the internal factor is that only in Europe, that rational thinking began to substitute intellectual activities that were shrouded in superstition and religion.

Secondly, there was an external elements as well, and this was the factor of colonisation, which created an exploitation nexus between these societies, which were exploited and others which exploited the societies.

However we find that there are many traces of ancient societies which coexist within the umbrella of modernity. This includes joint families, small scale enterprise, vast income diversity and so on. It has however been argued that features many in fact be regarded as aspects of modernity itself rather than any threat to it.

Modernisation was very beneficial to society in many ways, especially in the field of health and in the field of nutrition. Thus fatal diseases were controlled or eliminated, and the values of egalitarianism began manifesting themselves.

However some drawbacks are also there and the picture is not just positive. This not only did technological advantages breed greater economic wealth but also developed nuclear bombs two of which were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Nuclear technology still evokes negative responses, when it is proposed to be used for military purposes. Similarly the degradation of environment and overall pollution are well known. However decreasing biodiversity , climate change all result from a hyper individual society. Psychological problems and laxity of morals also create problems of modernity.

29.8   Approaches to Modernity

Thus as Taylor points out there are at least two approaches for the comprehension of how modernity came into being. These are ways of comprehending what makes the existing society so very different from that which enveloped man before modernity arose.

One method looks at the differences in contemporary western society and culture and medieval Europe as similar to the difference between medieval Europe and medieval India. So we can think about and analyse difference between civilizations, and their attendant culture. On the other hand the situation can be looked at from the viewpoint of change involving the end of one type of traditional society and the coming into being of modern societies. The latter perspective is the more influential one and it provides an analysis that gives a different perspective. The approach mentioned first is a **cultural approach** and the second an **a-cultural approach**. In the cultural approach there are many cultures, which have in them language and cultural

practices that help us to understand the self the other psychological sets, religion, morality and so on. These factors are specific to a culture and are often non comparable. Keeping the above in view a cultural theory of modernity outlines first and then analyses the transformation into the new culture. The present day world can be seen as a culture with specific comprehension of the self and morality. Thus this model of modernity can be seen and used analytically to contrast with the earlier aspects of civilization (Taylor, 2004). On the other hand, an **acultural** theory describes the entire process in terms of some culture neutral analysis. This implies that the entire process is not analysed in terms of culture that existed and then transformed into modernity. Rather it is considered too general an approach that can be seen as the process any traditional society would undergo. Thus **acultural theory** conceives of modernity as the rise of reason in different ways such as the growth of scientific consciousness, development of secular thought ways, instrumental rationality, fact finding and evolution.

Modernity can also be explained and accounted for in socio-cultural terms and also intellectual shifts. Thus transformation social, cultural, individual can be seen to arise from increased mobility, demographic changes, industrialisation and so on. In such cases as mentioned above modernity is conceived of as transformations which **all** cultures can go through and will undergo in due course of time.

Such changes are not defined in terms of individualism, morality, good and evil. They are instead talking of cultures and civilizations as a whole.

Box 29.4: Explanations of Modernity

…Explanations of modernity in terms of *reason* seem to be the most popular. Even social explanations tend to invoke reason. Social transformations, like mobility and industrialisation are thought to bring about intellectual and spiritual changes because they shake people loose from old habits and beliefs — religion or traditional morality — which then become unsustainable because they lack the kind of independent rational grounding that the beliefs of modernity — such as individualism or instrumental reason — are assumed to have (Charles Taylor, 2004, *Two Theories of Modernity*).

Thus any culture would be impacted by the increase in scientific consciousness, secularisation of religion and the growth of instrumental thinking. Modernity then, in this approach/theory issues from rationality which is culture-neutral. This is despite the fact that the theory can account for why modernity arose in one society rather than another; or why it arose in some societies first and other later. In fact the theory does not lay down specific points or stages into modernity but as something general that can take any particular culture as its input. So this operation/transformation is not to be seen as a perspective about human values or shared meanings. In the case of social explanations, causality is assigned to developments like industrialisation that do impact on values. Considering then the explanations in terms of rationality, this is thought to be the exercise of a "general capacity" which was ripe for maturing and unfolding. Given specific conditions, people see scientific thinking as having a place in society. They will also see that instrumental rationality is beneficial. Again religious beliefs are by no means universal or undisputed, and require a leap of faith. Finally facts and values are separated.

Now these transformations are facilitated by the presence of certain values and understandings and are hindered by other types of cultural values if they happen to be the dominant ones. These transformations are defined by the whole social and cultural context existing at any point of time.

We can see then that the dominant theories of modernity over the last few centuries have been of the acultural type. Modernity also involves a shift in the individual and community perspective. This is because until the viewpoint changes the society concerned cannot move from a pre-modern to modern and onto post modernity. On the other hand Weber paradoxically argues that the rationalisation (an important aspect of modernity) is a steady process, which was cultural general rather than culture specific. Similarly the process of pre- modern to modern in society was explained by Durkheim in terms of the transformation from mechanical to organised forms of social solidarity. This is an also the aspect of Tocqueville's concept of "creeping democracy" in which there was a move towards greater sense and actualisation of equality among the various strata of society. These are all different but at the same time related activities.

29.9   Conclusion

Given all these types if explanations Taylor still feels that explanations and analyses of modernity focusing on **reason** are the most accepted ones. Explanations focusing on the social still tend to talk of reason transformations that are social. Thus the factors of mobility and industrialisation are felt to bring about intellectual and spiritual changes since they tend to create new layers of conditioning which by pass the old layers. That is they loosen old habits and beliefs, whether religion or the old morality including individualism and instrumental reason. There is however the question of **negative** theories of modernity which do not have the positive or beneficial view of modern developments and see society going into a **decline** with the onset and the maturing of modernity. Thus rather than seeing modernity as having unleased many capacities in different directions, negative theories, see it as a dangerous development. These too are essentially acultural theories. Thus modernity is characterised by a loss of perspective, an erasure of roots, dependence on history or even God. Thus the negative theories of modernity see it as a loss of the previous state of overall well being.

That is to say that the arrival of modernity and all its various facets has to be seen as a mixed blessing. On one side are the positive socially relevant areas and technological development. On the other are the problems associated with the arrival of and settling down of modernity. Here the negatively oriented theorists point of that modernity has its own problems created by a fast developing technology that has its impact on the overall life of the people.

Thus while modernity began in the sixteenth century at the time of Enlightenment, it continued to develop until the beginning of the 20th century. In other words modernity has its "discontents" as well. Let us briefly mention what these are.

Firstly we must realise that modernity does have problems as we pointed out. The belief in development and progress, forward looking attitude, the dependence on rationality and reason have also given rise to optimism that was betrayed by doubts raised by post traditional thought. However we

must note that modernity achieved a lot of social structural changes.

Thus the routine behavior on day to day basis alters and changes as technology develops. This is because technological innovations and inventions since Enlightenment have altered the entire fabrics of the world, restricting itself to large well developed towns, cities, and metropolitans. It is capitalism which has basically been the power behind the innovations and inventions.

The airplane and motor car have from an initial slow start become integral parts of daily life the world over. Thus time and space have conceptually receeded and nothing can be done in the modern world with precise timing and adequate space. Thus mechanical solidarity has given way to organic solidarity to use the terms coined by Durkheim. Weber's concept of rationalisation has pervaded the modern world and given rise to precise type of thinking. Further urbanism saw large scale migrations. Discipline, secularity, alienation, anomic and the iron cage of bureaucracy are all parts of the organic structure of beaurocratic organisation in the modern world.

29.10 Further Reading

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Unit 30
Tradition and Modernity

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to

- describe the concept of tradition

- define modernity

- outline the "juggernaut" of modernity

- discuss modernity and rationality

30.1   Introduction

In this unit we will take up the topics of tradition and modernity. At the very outset it is pointed out that tradition and modernity are not contradictory or competing concepts. Rather they represent different faces of meaning and are in fact symbiotically related to each other. As such tradition (s) is the ground from which all manner of modernity arises. Further we may point out that as it stands tradition has to be qualified, which it is to say it could be a local tradition or an all-society tradition. Thus these are many different strands to the thinking on tradition and there are very many differing interpretations. Thus tradition is a live and vital factor in many cultures and could be:

- Tradition of food and edibles

- Tradition of music and dance

- Scriptural tradition

- Artistic tradition

- Martial arts tradition

- Sociological tradition

- Tradition and attire

Thus the terms 'tradition' and 'modernity' do not exist in isolation of each other but are in fact related to each other. While these terms concepts and processes exist, they exist and function dialogically. Thus modernity is an economic force while tradition is fundamentally cultural and social.

What is the role of tradition is a pertinent point here. Tradition is basically a series of attitudes, languages, music, art, scholarship and so on which have

been developing since ages past. Over the passage of time tradition becomes more or less entrenched in the body politic and we have even traditional law and scriptures in any case are an aspect of tradition. Now why is tradition so important to the individual and society? This is because it provides a continuity to social process and garners the creative and improvisational and transmits these traditions to the forthcoming generations of the members of a given society and thereby assuring survival of the society itself. Tradition is, therefore, a repository of survival mechanisms without which a society would fail to cohere. It would set fragmented and break up, the result of which would be anomic. Let us consider the music tradition in India. In this particular tradition of classical music there are "*gharanas*" or groupings, and each of these has a lineage comprising the singers who had commenced or inaugurated the *gharana* and all those who have passed their talent down the line producing maestros who would take over charge once the older musicians went on into retirement.

Now, once there is an example to work upon we can see that tradition also implies a life-style, a way of living. As such the training in music, art, drama is very rigid and within the confines of tradition which often passes by vote and repetition of movement, notes, or other exercise which any particular training may require. Usually with the teaching of traditional music and dance are an endless series of do's and don'ts which is what tradition is all about. Thus tradition refers *to a body of knowledge that has a structured inventory of actions and ideology* that comprise its legitimate domain. Thereafter it is a question of pinpointing what area of tradition is it that we are referring to. Thus on examination we find that tradition itself has a reasonably long duration for which it has established itself; further there are many different strands or what we may call "varieties of tradition." Then to continue with the example of music *gharanas* in India we find that there is a basic division between north Indian classical music and South Indian classical music. Each of these two basic divisions has numerous subdivisions and so on. It is, therefore, a misnomer to treat the concept of tradition as a term which covers everything in society and culture. Thus if it is held that the tradition of music is very strong in India, it may also be asked "what type of music tradition is it that is being referred to? ''

Clearly then tradition also represents a rubric under which all little traditions can be assimilated. If it is considered in depth tradition can be seen to involve various different types of activities within it which would need some brief elaboration. Tradition thus encompasses and embodies:

- a particular process or legacy
- sub traditions which from the field from which required contributions can be made
- a historical aspect, either oral or scripted
- a certain concept of the supernatural
- economic structures of sustanance
- aspects of indigenous art
- facts of architecture
- scholarship in all areas of social concern
- literature both scriptural and others
- technological structures
- military for self defense or offence

Thus tradition is clearly a type of structure and ideology that has a past and charges over time to absorb developments in that field so that tradition remains itself, but at the same time recreates and expands itself.

30.2 Tradition, Society and Culture

Tradition then is "accreted" over time and its boundaries become increasingly well defined. This means that tradition expands or contracts depending upon the social and cultural situation. Further it would be wrong to assume that traditions constantly expand and that progress is always linear. It is quite possible that there is non linear retrogression as well. A third situation arises when tradition develops an entropic tendency and stagnates for some time before once again addressing progression (linear forward movement) or retrogression.

Thus tradition begins when a particular action or activity is seen to be of significance to the society. However, as we have pointed out that there are many types of tradition (music, art, architecture) and many strands within each one of them. As such it is possible to study some of these strands but to study them in totality would imply many years of research and might still be lacking sufficient data to be able to come to a holistic and synoptic point of view (Rojas, 1966). Thus what we are talking about is the fact that there is no such thing as a total vision of any society which is pluralistic, since members from different races and ethnicities will have different traditions. Thus the tradition that peoples and societies inherit from their forefathers is available to them in various forms. Any process over several generations becomes by itself a particular tradition or a sub tradition.

Box 30.1: The Accretion of Tradition

Thus tradition:

▫ accumulates over decades/centuries. Consider for e.g. the scriptural tradition of India which is itself a plurality. Thus in the shift from oral tradition to the scripting tradition there is a formalisation of knowledge and as this process goes on the society that is subjected to it develops not just one but pluralist traditions.

▫ the field of art and architecture is replete with the traditions that have emerged from it. Thus in India there are several traditions in art and architecture including. The (i) Classical (ii) medieval and, (iii) traditional.

In each of these areas artists and architects have been responsible for development of classical medieval and traditional art and architecture. These traditions developed in India over centuries of accretion. Further the economic structures are such that they begin from centuries earlier and tend to be well fixed until Industrialisation begins in the 1800's. In the Indian tradition the exchange of goods and services commenced and worked in terms of physical exchanges of services which could be provided to the landlords by the hoi polloi. This was a traditional system and exploited the landless labourers by underpaying and making them work for long hours. For doing this the sharecroppers as they were known, were given at the end of the agricultural season a certain amount of grains to help them to subsist. Such examples can be found globally and feudalism was yet another iniquitous system. The point is that it is rather difficult to say with any degree of certainty that tradition(s) are 'good' or 'bad.' On examination, however, it is clear that though Indian tradition has sanctity yet sati and dowry is part of this very same tradition. Thus it is a weeding of tradition which alone can

make it work efficiently and not flow over into negative directives. Over a span of time (usually centuries) any specific tradition begins to coagulate into a specific conglomeration of beliefs and rities. These beliefs and rities are specific to any tradition and apply equally to sub traditions within and subordinate within it.

Traditions then cover the entire ideological gamut and are also applicable to the material culture. What then is tradition? Tradition is a particular approach to social reality which it influences and provides a direction to individual and social reality. Thus it would be better to talk in terms of the plural traditions than to mention some overarching condition which would be a false construct as reality is not entirely apprehended under it.

Traditional technology is another area which has been extensively used and improved upon. Thus in agriculture the use of the tractor or combine harvester has brought matters to a confrontation. Thus while the situation (harvesting) has changed, the attitudes are still traditional, both in the family and at work. Thus at a particular time in the flow of tradition non-traditional, modern machines, are used. This means now that there is a contradiction between the technology and the attitudes of the workers and their beneficiaries. Age old customs and tradition's often get non functional and sometimes changes have to be introduced to make the two compatible. Tradition then is what holds a society together. However, there are factors within a tradition which may go out of circulation. Thus in some metros in India the scriptural and popular level of celebrating festivals, like Holi, Diwali, and so on is such that tradition battles with culture and many changes have occurred in these festivals in cities including plastic lighting on the house and a few burning candles to observe traditional candle lighting in Diwali.

30.3   Tradition and Modernity

In such and other activities tradition comes head on with the whole concept of modernity. The question of course is in which way modernity relates to tradition. Is modernity a different type of tradition? Do tradition and modernity have anything in common and how are they related to each other?

Tradition has a tendency to become entropic and inward looking. This is true of many local level traditions and sub traditions are stamped out and disappear without leaving much of a trace. The pertinent question here is why does tradition disappear, change, ameliorate or attempt to coexist with modernity? The fact of the matter is that the vectors or chief characteristics of a tradition are themselves set to develop, change, or become stagnant. Thus tradition has many sub traditions and it is these that often linger on, indefinitely, in various geophysical territories within a specific culture area.

Reflection and Action 30.1

Discuss the concept of tradition ? Does tradition change or does it remain static?

At some point in the development or spread of a tradition tends to become less influential and is capable of dealing only with local traditions. At the some time tradition sees the necessity of dynamism and various religious traditions themselves find it difficult to sustain themselves. Thus when a tradition becomes entropic it becomes clear that the tradition is now stagnant

and in being so is quite capable of calcifying and becomes superficially related to rities, rituals, ceremonies while the essential communication remains obfuscated and confused.

Thus tradition is dynamic and records accretive changes. We must also keep in mind that social changes are part of the process of society. However, it is equally clear that beyond a point tradition is not able to deal with a new set of situations and the new institutions, At this point if the society is not to become anarchic, it will require that traditions ameliorate and try to change. Yet a tradition can only follow its ontology and find itself as inadequate in the face of modernity. Thus the forces of modernity tend to choke tradition or at least make it relatively insignificant and even innocuous. However, tradition though it becomes quiescent it is not really banished by modernity because modernity is evidenced only in the advanced countries of the West and in the metropolitans of the East. This is made clear when we compare architecture of the North and the South. Thus a luxury hotel in metropolitan of a developing country is virtually no different than that of an advanced country. Thus tradition is never really banished but is pushed back as the forces of modernity take root.

Box 30.2: Aspects of Modernity

Some aspects of modernity include:
- emergence of nation-state and nationhood
- industrialisation and capitalism
- democracy
- increasing influence of science and technology
- the phenomena of urbanisation
- expansion of mass media

There are, however, other defining characteristics of modernity which include
- disenchantment with the world
- secularisation
- rationalisation
- commodification
- mass society

Modernity, however, means different things in the North and the South. Thus modernity indicates a type of society that is more developed relative to other societies. So, a society characterised by modernity is described as a modern society.

We can compare modern society with societies that are pre-modern or those that are post-modern. However neither of these approaches is fully satisfactory. The social structure of modernity is such that it defines the transition from isolated communities to mass scale society. Referred to in this manner modernity is found, therefore, not just in the West. This process can be seen as working all over the world rather than just in the advanced nations.

Thus mass society implies:
- large scale movement of goods, people, and information among separate areas
- standardisation of many aspects of society which are helpful for mobility

- increased specialisation and interdependence of different parts of the society

Thus modernity can be apparently contradictory, but these features listed above are different parts of the overall ontology of this process. When the elements or products of modernity "invade" another culture through popular processes such as various cultural aspects such as folktales and cinema there is a widespread 'overhaul' of cultural and social ontology and these tend to change a society and prepare it for further changes. This results in a homogenisation of culture and creates widespread diversification at the local level. There are other features, such as democratic government and the hierarchical structures within it. So also does the private sector grow greatly in influence (Genard Delanty, 2000). This sometimes creates a friction and modernity can be perceived as being totalitarian. However, the individual in modernity belongs to those subsystems, and is part of the competition, liberty, and individualism. This is all the more true for comparisons of modernity with societies that are traditional.

Modernity brought with it many blessings to the people including much better health and economic prospects. However, there are also some problems which have emerged with modern society e.g. the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during world war II; and the arms race thereafter. Other problems include environmental degradation e.g. air and water pollution. Modernity also creates great stress on people and alienation or being without specific interest in anything (malaise). At the present point the debate is still on whether modernity is socially positive or not, whether it has proved beneficial or not to world society.

30.4 Modernity as a Juggernaut

Giddens position conflicts with the contention that society has entered into a post modern world. Thus modernity witnesses tremendous increases in the scope, pace and depth of change relative to systems that preceded it. Further the path or trajectory of change is not linear, going forward step by step. For Giddens modernity implies

- capitalism
- industrialism
- surveillance programs and activities
- military power

Giddens theory of structuration and its basic components adequately describe modernity. These elements are:

- distanciation, or separation in of time and space
- disembedding
- reflexivity

While in pre-modern societies time and space were totally interconnected. However, with the onset of modernity time and space were no longer closely linked, and this interconnection became very weak. Now, this fact is important so far as modernity is concerned.

Distanciation helps in the establishment of organisations and bureaucracy, and makes possible the nation-state which is international. That is it is

possible to connect local and global arenas. Again the modern society is within the matrix of history and it takes from that to influence the present. Finally such distanciation makes possible the second of Giddens factors of modernity that is disembedding. Disembedding itself is the process of transcending the local context and it's reorganising itself along indefinite stretches of time and space. According to Giddens there are two varieties of disembedding factors. These are:

- symbolic tokens e.g. money. This allows for time-space distantiation and allows money transactions with those who are widely separated in time and space.

- systems of professional expertise. These are very useful because they help create the environment. Some such experts include doctors and lawyers. Other experts affect everyday commodities and even property. Thus expert systems provide reassurance across time and space. Again in abstract systems, trust is fundamental not only to modern societies also because the symbolic tokens and expert systems serve to dissemble the society in the modern world.

Thus an economy based on monetary transactions and the legal system work because the members have trust in them.

Again another basic characteristic of modernity is the phenomena of reflexivity. Thus all social and psychological aspects, processes, events, can be reflected upon, understood better and working as an activity which influences the further development of a phenomenon. The fact of disembedment indicates

- the need for trust

- the need for expert systems

Trust according to Giddens is socialised into children and then reinforced by behaviour that conforms to this expectation of mutually reliable behaviours. However, this is also accompanied by destabilising factors, risk factors that threaten trust and create ongoing lack of security in people. Thus the risk of nuclear wars are neither fought nor won. The risk factor in global or local war is such that several danger points have arisen and disarmament of military of nuclear warheads could easily be one of the international projects to increase the sense of security for the subjects.

Giddens points out that the risk factor extends into the material environment and what can be done to prevent its degradation (forests, rivers, rural and urban habitats). Again global investments existing in institutional settings are also risky. The subjects take notice of risks while taking action. Religion receded and only those facts are believed in which the subjects can realise and turn into reality. The awareness of the different risk factors is increasing in the modern world and is one of the facts of modernity. Again the subjects and the 'public' are aware that even experts cannot handle certain risks and risk-situations.

30.5   Ontological Insecurity and Modernity

According to Giddens ontological insecurity has been created within modernity itself and suggests that

- *design faults* in the construction of the modern world

- *operator failure* of those who run the modern world

- *unintended consequences*
- *reflexivity of the modern society*

Thus according to Giddens in modern society 'control' becomes an important issue because new knowledge is continuously cropping up and superceding the old, and giving it a different direction altogether. As an answer to this Giddens suggests *utopian realism*.

That is utopian ideals and social reality should be taken together as a single unit rather than aim for just the one or the other. Giddens is critical of the postmodern theories and feels that were systematic knowledge impossible the intellectual activity/academics would come to a standstill. He feels that postmodernism would involve a world in which

- there are post scarcity systems
- multilayered democracy
- demilitarisation
- humanisation of technology

However, it is clear that post modernity cannot be predicted in such simple parameters which need not appear at all.

Giddens notes that the reflexive modern world pushes the self into becoming a "reflexive project." Thus the self becomes an area to be reflected upon with a view to ameliorating it and bringing it into tune with itself and society. Thus he points out that the subject is a result of inner search and also the body must be controlled and socially projected in a specific manner in the relevant physical spaces. There are formulas how which define we interact. In fact reflexivity has led to a body-obsession and a social neurosis. Modernity and modern society are also characterised by setting apart some areas of deviance from the normal day to day living. This has been termed the "Sequestration of experience" by Giddens. Thus phenomena like madness, sickness, death and sexuality are sequestered and delineated as areas that should be hidden from the attention. The reason that the phenomena of sequestration comes about is because abstract systems have controlled large segments of society. Though sequestration brings with it a sense of penacling security it is quite clear that there is an avoidance of basic truths, such as the processes of death, sickness, madness etc.

Thus modernity has brought with both positive and negative consequences. One of the negative consequences is that there tends to be a sort of malaise or what Giddens terms "personal meaninglessness." This is because important areas of daily life have been sequestered, and repressed. The light at the end of the tunnel is reflexivity of modern life which as it increases will ensure that such sequestration does not take place and processes that have been swept under the carpet will one day be the most significant and important. While Giddens is concerned with modernity we find that Beck is interested in the new modernity. Thus Beck and Giddens feel that we are living in a modern world rather than a post modern one. What is the risk that accompanies the new modernity? Beck labels the new modernity as "reflexive modernity." Beck feels that relationships in such a society are increasingly reflexive and individuals are forced to make wide range of individual decisions so far as relationships are concerned, and how they can be begun and maintained.

According to Beck, within modernity itself there is a change from industrial society to the risk society which is different from industrial society but not totally. Thus the classical modernity was centred on producing wealth and equal distribution of the same. On the other hand the advanced modern societies the main issue is the reduction and canalisation of risk. Thus the main concern in classical modernity believed in equality, the concern of advanced modernity is a safety. These risks come from wealth produced in industry. This includes the nuclear industry and bombs whose effects and side effects can be devastating.

> **Box 30.4: The Risk Factor**
>
> Even industrial pollutants are themselves a source of risk and have most dangerous effects on health. This kind of risk, including nuclear annihilation, is not simply localized but global. Again risk and class intermesh to some extent. Thus in industrial society it is clear that the wealthy classes can avoid risk or reduce it simply because they have the wealth to purchase safety. And this helps to strengthen the class society. On the other hand poverty is full of risks. Beck extends his analysis and states that the truth about social classes applies to the nation-states as well.

Thus the rich nations are able to minimize risks, the poor or poorer nations find that risk is centred in and around them. Again richer nations make further wealth and profit by catering to the poorer nations in order to build technology that will help to control the risks in poor nations and try to ameliorate them to some extent. It is pointed out, however, that no nation is completely safe from risks, nor are individuals. However, the nations that profit from the risk factor in poor nations find that there is a 'boomerang effect' and factors associated with risk tend to become proactive and try to eliminate or control the areas where risk reduction technologies are being made in the wealthy nations. However, though advanced modernity creates risks we find that accompanying these risks is reflexivity and makes those that produce risks themselves begin to think about the situation and how to alter it. But this is also in the case of those nations that are poor and face these risks. According to Beck it is science and the scientists that are responsible and a protector of global "contamination" of nature and culture, and accuses science and scientists for being illogical.

> **Reflection and Action 30.2**
>
> Discuss the aspects of risk taking in modern society. Is there some way in which this can be reduced or removed?

Again in classical industrial society we find that nature and culture were separate entities in the case of advanced modernity they go hand in hand are deeply interlinked and interrelated to each other. This linkage means that changes in either nature or culture feedback onto each other. Thus Beck points out that nature and society are related to each other almost symbiotically. This has led to the facts of nature being made political and so scientists, including social scientists are now in the domain of and being effected by politicisation. According to Beck the governments are losing their powerful control because of sub political bodies like research institutes. Subgroups of people are more responsive relative to the government. We can say advanced modernity has generated both hormones risks and also ways to deal with it. Ritzer evaluates modern society using the concepts of hyperrationality, Mcdonaldization and Americanization. Let us begin with

hyperrationality. Ritzer points out that the concept of hyperrationality draws heavily on rationality as conceptualised by Weber. For Weber we live in an increasingly rational world. Formal rationality is seen to be used for system-usage than Weber's other types of rationality: Substantive, theoretical and practical. Thus we see that formal rationality implies the increasingly felt need and importance of institutions which force members to adhere to a strict code of behaviour and conduct.

30.6 Modernity Rationality and Norms

On the other hand, substantive rationality implies dominance of norms and values in making of rational choice. Thus theoretical rationality deals with intellectual apprehension. On the other hand practical rationality defines the context/situation so far as daily decisions are concerned.

Now, we can say that hyperrationality goes beyond formal rationality. Thus a hyperrational system combines Webber's forms of rationality which include,

- formal rationality
- substantive
- intellectual
- practical

The reason such a system is called hyperrational because it uses and combines all four of Weber's forms of rationality.

Formal rationality has four aspects which are:

- efficiency
- predictability
- quantity rather than quality
- Substitution of non human for human technologies

Box 30.4: The Irrationality of Rationality

Thus this form of rationality is also accompanied by the "irrationality of rationality." In this schema we find that efficiency is always with a view to an end. And how we can use the best means to a goal. In fact food restaurants the delivery system is made so convenient and automatic that there are drive in facilities to help accelerate the process of food distribution and consumption. Now, the next factor in formal rationality is that there is a standardisation of processes and events and there are "no surprises", and the branches of fast food restaurants are very similar even across nations. They all proceed along the assembly line, mechanised approach to food. Further fast food restaurants pay greater attention to quantity rather than quality. Such a formally rational system has intrinsic to it the generation of "irrationalities", such as making the "dining experience" most bizarre, demystifying and dehumanising.

Ritzer indicates that this is the trend all over the modern world where the emphasis is on quick turnover for business. Examining credit cards Ritzer feels that each of the factors applied to Mcdonaldization are true for the credit card industry. Loans are processed quickly. Again the credit card makes consumption predictable. Credit cards come with different credit limits and the transactions are relatively dehumanizing. Thus both the credit card and

the fast food restaurant can be seen to be an intrinsic aspect of the modern world.

Ritzer also argues for the "Americanization" of modern society which was evident in our discussion of fast food restaurants and credit card usage. Thus America is perceived as practicing/living in a modern world and engaged in the construction of the American way of life. Thus credit card usage is part of Americanization. The major credit cards companies are based in America. The Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are major cards relative to those based in Britain (Barclay Card) and Japan (JCB). The credit card companies are making a concerted effort to 'globalize' the credit cards. It is noted, however, that credit cards are and can be used for indigenous purchases. This both the credit cards and fast food restaurants have become part of the modern world and is in part a reflection of a specific world era. Let us now turn to some of the main ideas in the social theory of Jurgen Habermas, concerning modernity. Habermas feels that modernity has yet to play itself out and that there are many modern areas that can be developed further, before thinking of a postmodern world. According to Habermas modernity does have a number of paradoxes. Thus rationality that is a part of the overall social system is contradictory and conflictual with the rationality of the life-world as a whole. On the one hand social systems have multiplied their complexity and use instrumental reason. Again the life-world has also multiplied its diversity in terms of secularisation and the processes of reflexivity.

Thus a rational society according to Habermas is one where the system and the life-world exist together living an intermeshed but parallel existence. This conjoining and interaction leads to a stage in society of abundance economically, and environmental control due to rational systems being present and employed to their optimum. The problem of the modern world is that now the system begins to exercise power or to 'colonize' the life-world. This leads to a situation where the rational system denies the freedom to the life-world, a freedom that is necessary to allow the life world to grow to further maturity. Thus for Habermas the 'colonization' of the life world in modernity is its basic marker, and is, therefore, that he regards modernity as an 'unfinished project.' To Habermas the fully rational society where the rational system and the Life world(s) can exist and express themselves satisfactorily. At the moment such a situation does not exist and the life-world is greatly subdued and impoverished. This is the obstacle that has to be crossed over. It does not mean a violent destruction of systems economic or administrative, since they help life worlds to rationalize their existence and ontology. How is this to be done? This requires that we examine the relationship between system and life-world.

According to Habermas

- "restraining barriers" should be erected to reduce colonisation of life world
- "sensors" should be used to make a greater impact of life world on the system

In this manner the two areas that is life world and system benefit each other greatly. Habermas feels that until the above facts assert themselves modernity's project will take long to complete. Thus Habermas is squarely of the view that modernity has much to offer and that we are not in a postmodern society as yet.

30.7   Conclusion

Finally to put the last word in Habermas has criticized postmodernism on several grounds. Since our next unit is on post structuralism/postmodernism this unit would serve also as a precursor of our discussion on the same. Thus for Habermas:

- It is very difficult to objectively evaluate the postmodernists because one is not sure whether what one is reading is social theory or literature. In the former case the problems arises in postmodernists erecting a formidable fascade of jargon which is not in the mainstream of sociological knowledge. Hence, one doesn't know where to classify such theory.

- Normative sentiments are concealed from the reader, but nevertheless they offer normative critiques of contemporary society. However, these are not exactly grounded and, therefore, not effective.

- It has a totalising tendency despite the fact that postmodernists themselves are against this phenomena.

- Post modernists ignore the facts of daily life.

In short postmodernists are shut off from the very sphere (life-world) of activity from which they deprive themselves. As such the source of social data and the area of expression, that is everyday life is, cut off from them.

Thus in this unit we have examined and presented several theoretical positions on tradition and modernity. We have covered the approach of Giddens to modernity as also that of Beck and Ritzer. Finally, we considered the ideas of Habermas. All this has set the stage for our next unit. To fully understand and appreciate the units on post structuralism and postmodernism the background provided in this unit will be of great use.

30.8   Further Reading

Bauman, Z(1989), *Modernity and The Holocaust.* Cambridge:Polity

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30.9   References

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Unit 31
Post Structuralism and Post Modernism

Contents

Learning Objectives

After having read this unit you should be able to

▢   outline post-structural theories

▢   critique structuralism

▢   describe deconstruction

▢   explain "late capitalism"

▢   discuss Baudrillard and postmodernism

31.1   Introduction

It is the intellectual trend in the ontology of ideas and schools of ideas, that they are constantly superceded. The ideas or ideologies that are superceded recede into the history of ideas. The new theories and ideas then occupy centre stage in the national and international sociological and social scientific world views. This cycle further repeats itself and though this fact is often lost sight of in the heyday of a theoretical orientation that has become popular.

In the essay that follows we will first take up post structuralism and then postmodern theory. We will see how there are several overlaps indeed intermeshes between various strands of these two contemporary approaches to the study of society and culture. Thus what we are dealing with are strands of an overall approach. There is no one view on these approaches and both post structuralism and post modernism are blanket terms containing many strands of thought. Let us turn now to post structuralism first. What does the term indicate? As is clear from the word "post structuralism", these approaches are those that came after 'structuralism'. These theories and approaches sought to seek insights into society by critiquing and deconstructing social and cultural processes. The post modernism break with structuralism was the fact that structuralism reduced everything into binary oppositions and the interrelations between them. The structuralists held they could analyse any phenomena with the help of their methodology. We must emphasise that post structuralism is a number of approaches and not one monolithic theory. However, these approaches have in common their point of departure a critique of "structuralism".

31.2 Critique of Structuralism

Poststructuralists often point out in their various writings that meaning in language is diverse and open to many different interpretations. Yet to get to the meaning of a text it can be deconstructed and is different from its apparent or surface meaning. That is different meanings can be assigned to a single text depending upon the perspective taken. As would be clear by now that post structuralism proceeds as a critique of structuralism which is itself bounded by its own linguistic boundaries. Structuralism, however, was found to be inadequate as an explanation of social process and phenomena. Thus we find that

- structuralism did not pay heed to historical processes and is a-historical

- applied the rules of linguistics to societal processes which is a questionable procedure

- it is assumed that a work has meaning in itself and this persists even before it is discovered and

- the text is only a conduit between the subject and the structure of rationality.

Thus the structuralists argue that it is language and its structure which itself produces reality and since it is language that is responsible for thought it determines mans perceptions whatever they may be. Further there is the idea that meaning does not come from individuals but the rules of language and the overall 'system' which controls individuals. Therefore, the individual is subordinated and superceded by "the structure." It is the structure which produces meaning not the individual. It is specifically language which is at the base of such domination over the individual.

31.3 Post Structural Theories

As can be seen post structural theories do not agree with the 'structuralists' in several key areas of analysis and understanding. We will now turn to these and see how the two differ. However, before that let us look briefly at the background to post structuralism. By the 1950's the influence of structuralism had set in. Saussure (1857-1913) was of the view that 'meaning' had to be found in the "structure" of the whole language (Guller, 1976). It could not be discovered in individual words, and had to have an overall linguistic setting – that is the language as a whole. We find that around the 1960's the structuralist movement tried to amalgamate the ideas of Marx Freud and Saussure. The structuralists were opposed to the existentialist movement which put the individual and life experience at the centre. By contrast the structuralists opined that the individual is everywhere being conditioned by social psychological and linguistic structures which control and direct him, rather than the individual doing the same. As you will have noticed this is an extreme stand and the claim for universality of application of method also drew attention to the fact that such claims of universal application did not necessarily hold true. Also how is it that any two structural analyses of the same field or phenomena would be different?

It was because of the short-comings of the structuralist approach that post structuralism was developed by the intellectuals. This post structuralism is based on a member of basic assumptions/positions. These include: 1) putting all phenomena under one explanation, 2) there is a transcendental reality which overarches all other reality. Post structuralism is also critical of the

concept of man as portrayed and developed by Enlightenment thought. The Enlightenment view that the individual is separate and whole and that the mind is the area where values evolve on the other hand the poststructuralists felt that the individual was embedded in social interaction. Such symbolic beings are referred to by the word "subject". We can then say that the subjects are intertwined with society and culture and occupy some place within them, and sociologically based sites. Further subjects are the actors in everyday reality. In fact it is the subjects that make up society and the activities therein, include work and entertainment. We could add here that the subjects meaning and values are embedded in the identities of groups and the activities which lead them to having an identity.

Thus these approaches that we are discussing have often been dubbed "anti-humanist" because post-structuralism is against the divine or transcendental wholeness as was the humanist theories view. However, 'anti-humanist' is a misnomer and is actually another way of looking at human beings one that is essentially not against individual persons. Further we find that while structuralism presents reality as relations between binary oppositions post-structuralism's vision of reality is a fragmented one. Social process and cultural relations are not viewed as neat oppositions – on the other hand social and cultural processes are seen in bits and pieces and the nature of reality is not seen as being amenable to total understanding of a whole process. Parts of social process can be focused upon and analysed. Poststructuralists are completely opposed to grand narratives and Meta theory feeling these are equivalent to a fiction and not really apprehending reality. Thus post-structural theories are themselves looking at the specific. Further the physical self (the body) is studied in the context of time and history, and brought out of the closet so to speak. Similarly it is the details of discourse and cultural actions that are now looked into. Further the role of language in building social and cultural reality is also evident in the work of the poststructuralists (Godelier, 1972). Thus the fact that society and the individual are "linguistically bound" with each other and the relationship between the two is complex. This stand clearly negates the earlier assumptions of social scientists that language was easy to comprehend and use and that there were no ambiguities regarding language - use. This the post-structural theories negate as an erroneous assumption. In fact "reality'' itself is constructed within the social matrix and continues to reproduce itself over time.

31.4 Discourse Knowledge and Experience

The world of discourse and knowledge set the limits for our experience – and the subject (ego) can only experience or describe what he has experienced. That is to also say that there are experiences for which there is no language or a language is slowly being pieced together, and certain words and concepts gain ground and usage. This includes the usage of metaphor, metonymy and irony. These usages lead by themselves to a concern with ideology which provides an ingress and insight into relations of power and the world-view of the subjects.

Again another area in which post structural theories focus upon in their analysis on what are known as cultural codes which themselves provide an understanding of our lives and how they work out within various contexts. However, it needs to be pointed out that it is understood by the post structuralists that construction of meaning implies that some aspects of

social process and individual life will be emphasised and others will be relatively reduced in importance. In other words "objectivity" as in the case of earlier sociological theory is found to be an illusion. That is the analyses of poststructuralists does not deny its subjective orientation. Yet poststructuralists also hold that meaning in society can be deconstructed to open up new ideas and practices. However, such an exercise leads to an understanding of specifics rather than general constructions. Thus loops of meaning and process of construction reveal more about the specific scaffolding of the subject rather than an understanding of the whole. The world is mediated by discourse, language and ideology all of which structure the experience of the subject. According to post structural thinking it is the text which is the repertoire of meanings and there is no meaning outside the text. Thus meaning resides in the text itself in toto. An understanding resides in social signs and discourses in particular fields of study. Again almost paradoxically, every text exists only in relation to other texts. However, it needs to be pointed out that man's ability to perceive reality is not at stake. Nonetheless what we know of reality is known through various processes of discourse symbols and language. Yet it must be understood that discourse itself is very varied in content. It is also a fact that discourse is sometimes sketchy and abrupt. It originates through chance and disappears also through unspecified reasons. Thus according to Foucault there is no question of predicting history through grand theories and meta narratives (Foucault, 1969). History is thus viewed by poststructuralists as happening by chance. Thus in history the twists, turns, plots, subplots and important events and happenings cannot be pinned down – that is it happens by chance.

31.5   Derrida and Deconstruction

This brief note on structuralism is important for our understanding of the process of "deconstruction" initiated by Derrida. The basics of this structuralism are:

▢ positing of a centre of power or influence which begins and ends all social processes. This could be 'mind' or 'self' or even 'God'.

▢ all structures are composed of binary pairs or oppositions one of which is more important than the other and often signified thus: +/- . These could be good/evil, god/man and so on.

Reflection and Action 31.1

Discuss what is "deconstruction". How did Derrida deconstruct structuralism?

Thus post structuralism began with Derrida's critique of structuralism or rather this 'deconstruction' of language society and culture. The structuralists felt that man was chained to structures which controlled him. In contrast, however, Derrida feels that language can be reduced to writing which does not control the subjects. According to him all institutions and structures are nothing but writing and incapable of controlling the individual. The structuralists saw order and stability in language, hence in all structures; the poststructuralists on the other hand saw language as essentially changing and quite unstable. This means that the language structure being itself in flux cannot create structures that constrain, restrain, or punish people, because language itself is disorderly, and the underlying laws of language cannot be 'discovered'. This is what is the process of deconstruction which as the term suggests is a sort of conceptual dissection of the concept or

process being studied. Derrida who coined the term deconstruction felt that logo centrism has dominated the Western countries. This way of perceiving has meant that writing has always been suppressed historically speaking. This has also meant that the freedom to analyse and think is taken away in a logocentric system. Derrida wants to dismantle this type of approach as it sets writing free from repression. Under these circumstances what takes place in the art form of traditional theatre is a representation of real life. Such a representation is extremely important, in fact a controlled theological theatre.

Box 31.1: The Theological Theatre

Derrida contrasts 'theatre of cruelty' as against traditional theatre which has representational logic and renders traditional theatre as theological. Derrida writes: the stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition comports the following elements: an author creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation …. He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors ….. who represent the thought of the "creator". Finally the theological stage comports a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of enjoyers. (Derrida, 1978, *Writing and Difference* : p:235).

Derrida's chosen alternative stage is one which will not be controlled by texts and authors but fall short of disorder/anarchy. Thus Derrida wants a fundamental change in traditional theatre/life which would mean a great change from the dominance of the writer (God?) on the stage (theatre) or in societal process as well leading closer towards freedom of the individual. Derrida feels thus that traditional theatre needs to be deconstructed. In this mode of suggestion is included a critique of society itself, which is, as mentioned earlier 'logocentric.' Derrida feels that in theatre it is the writer who puts together the script, and that this influence is so strong that it is akin to a dictatorship. Similarly in social processes the intellectual ideas and formulations are controlled by the intellectual authorities which create discourse.

Further we may add that post structuralists believe in the process of decentering because when these is no specific authoritarian pressure on society it becomes open ended and available for 'play and difference'. This process is ongoing reflexive and open (Derrida, 1978 :297). Thus the present alone exists and it is the arena where social activity takes place. Thus we should try to find solutions by harking to the past. The future itself cannot be precisely predicted. However, there is no precise solution that Derrida provides except that in the end there is only writing, acting and play with difference. At this point in our presentation it would be instructive to look briefly at an example of post structural ideas and ideology in the case of Michel Foucault one of the major poststructuralists. One critical difference between Foucault and the structuralists is that while linguistics is the main influence for the former, it did not occur exclusively as the domain of ideas that have to be adopted or modified into a poststructuralist schema. That is post structural thinkers use a variety of ideas and influence and are not reduced to examining the relations between binary terms. This variety of sources in presenting an argument is what puts Foucault into the group of the poststructuralists.

31.6   Foucault and the Archaeology of Knowledge

Foucault described his approach/methodology as the "archaeology of knowledge." Using this approach Foucault studied knowledge and discourse. According to Foucault this approach provides better ingress to understanding society and it is different from history, which he feels is portrayed in a stereotyped linear progression, whereas the reality remains limited and 'continuous.'

Box 31.2: The Archaeology of Knowledge

In his early work on methodology, Foucault (1966) is doing an "archaeology of knowledge". His objects of study are bodies of knowledge, ideas, modes of discourse, he contrasts his archaeology of knowledge to history and the history of ideas, both of which he regards as being too rational and as seeing to much continuity in the history of knowledge.... This highly structural approach in Foucault's early work was later abandoned for a poststructuralist orientation because it was silent on the issue of power as well as the link between knowledge and power. Michel Foucault died in 1984 at the age of 58 as a leading sociologist. Among Foucault's last works was a trilogy of sexual study. There works indicated Foucault's interest in studying sexuality. These books were The History of Sexuality 1976, The Care of the Self 1984, and The Use of Pleasure 1984. (From Ritzer, 1996 *Sociological Theory*, p:604-5).

Foucault, however, moved away from this structural type of analysis and began studying the 'genealogy of power.' His concern was to find out the facts about governance through knowledge production. The nature of knowledge as power should not be hierarchical and also that the higher the knowledge (e.g. science) the greater the power it wields over the subjects. Thus Foucault studied technique and process in science since this is what exerts power over people through the medium of institutions. This is not to say that the elites are scheming and manipulating power. Again Foucault uses a non linear perception of progress in societies from the stage of barbarism to the present civilisation. Thus history is seen instead as shifting patterns of domination. However, knowledge/power is such that it is always opposed and resisted. Thus Foucault's post structural view is that while knowledge/power are ubiquitous they are certainly not omnipotent and total in their domination but their power/authority is always questioned and opposed. A brief introduction to Foucault's ideas would help us in completing the section on post structuralism (Foucault, 1979). Thus according to Foucault

- the mad have been misunderstood and mistreated over the course of history, and subjected to moral control

- power/knowledge are implicative of each other

- technologies exert power e.g. the Panopticon a prison with the cells around a large observation tower from which every thing that inmates do is visible and observable. Such an institution is metaphoric of total societal control of the prisoners, since it forces even the prisoners or inmates to exercise self-restraint. Thus this is a direct relationship between technology, knowledge and power. Thus the Panopticon is a prototype of societal control and surveillance and the forerunner of intelligence services and satellite observations over geophysical territories.

Post modernism is not the term for a single type of theory, metanarrative, or grand theory. It is rather the term for an overall approach involving many

similar strands. There is thus no single position in postmodernism, but all the thinkers in this approach share certain common features that separate it from "modernism." This has been both a feature that separates it from 'modernism' and the approaches all indicate that what they are doing is to present, dissect, construct ideas that will be relevant to the postmodern context. A large number of sociologists still tend to think that post modernism is a passing fancy, however, it is now obvious that postmodernism cannot be ignored both as fact and phenomena. However, it cannot be denied that postmodernism is surrounded by diverse positions within the field itself.

Reflection and Action 31.2

Outline the common features of postmodern writers. How are these separate from "modernism".

It would be proper at this point to distinguish between some common terms that are often confused with each other although they are quite distinct from one another. Thus "post modernity" is the word used for the historical epoch following the modern era. Further 'post modernism' itself refers to cultural products which are different/separate from the modern cultural products (in art, architecture etc.). Again 'postmodern social theory' refers to a method of ideating that differs from modern social theory.

From the above it can be said that the post modern covers: 1) a new epoch, 2) new cultural products, 3) new theories about society. Further these new realities are getting strengthened and there is a widespread feeling that the modern era is ending and being superceded by another epoch. This was evident in breaking up of buildings which were modern and complete. However, the post modern theories themselves provide ready made solutions in a general sense. However, it is questionable whether the birth of the post modern era can be precisely dated though it appears to have transited, from the modern in the 1960's.

Post modernism indicates that in the cultural field postmodern cultural products tend to replace modern products. Again postmodern social theory has emerged from and has differences with modern social theory. Thus postmodern theory rejects the notion of 'foundationalism' of the earlier theories but itself tends to be relative, non relational and nihilistic.

31.7 Jameson and Late Capitalism

Again the postmodern thinkers reject the nation of a grand narrative or meta narrative. For example Lyotard contrasts modern knowledge which has a grand synthesis e.g. the work of Parsons or Marx such narratives are associated with modern science. Thus as Lyotard identifies modern knowledge with metanarratives, then obviously postmodern approaches demand that such theorising should be negated in its completeness. This is because postmodern scholars such as Lyotard are not afraid to face the differences and challenges of such a viewpoint. Thus post modernism becomes an instrument that welcomes different perspectives under the same broad umbrella. Let us now turn to look at some examples of postmodern theory. A good illustration of the postmodern theory is clearly set out in the work of Fredric Jameson. The point of departure is that modernity and post modernity mark a radical break from each other and are hard to reconcile the two. However, a middle position is taken by Jameson who writes that there are some continuities between the two epochs. According to Jameson

capitalism is in its 'late' stages, but continues to be the main form of production the world over. However, this 'late' stage of capitalism has been ushered in with post modernism. Thus while the cultural logic is altered, the underlying structure remains the same as in the incipient forms of capitalism. This is reflective of the Marxian framework. Jameson sees the postmodern situation as possessing both positive and negative aspects of postmodernism. Thus there is progress and chaos side by side. Thus according to Jameson there are three stages in the progress of capitalism. The first is market capitalism typified by national markets. Following this phase comes the imperialist stage which is backed up by a global capitalist network. Then the third phase is 'late capitalism' share capital is used to commodify new areas. The effect of changes in the economic structure automatically create appropriate cultural changes. Thus Jameson points out that we can see that:

- realist culture is associated with market capitalism

- modernist culture is associated with monopoly capitalism

- postmodern culture and multinational capitalism

Box 31.3: Late Capitalism

…..aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more morel seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the institutional support of all kinds available for art, from foundation and grants to museums and other forms of patronage. (from Frederic Jameson, 1984 "*Post-Modernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*". New Left Review, p:57).

Jameson's perspective, works mainly within a base and superstructure model. According to Jameson postmodern society has some characteristics: firstly there is superficiality, in the sense the cultural products keep to superficiality and do not enquire deeply into the situation e.g. the soup cans and portrait of Marolyn Munroe – both of which are simulacra as they are a "copy of a copy." Both paintings were painted from a copy of the photographs. Thus the pictures are simulacrum – in which one cannot distinguish the original from the copy (Jameson, 1984:86). These paintings are simulacrum and lack in depth, and covers the surface meanings only. Further emotion or emotionality is hardly to be found is the postmodern societies. Thus alienation has been supplanted by fragmentation, which results in the impensonalization of interaction. Again, and thirdly historicity is set aside and it is clear that all that can be known about the past is textual and can spawn intertextuality at the most. What this implies is that the postmodernists do not restrict themselves to a single linear past but pick and choose from among the available styles. That is to say there is a strong element of *pastiche*. This implies that 'truth' about past history, is that we have no way of knowing what happened. The historians then have to be satisfied with a *pastiche* which in itself may not reflect much of past reality and there is no such thing as linear historical development. Finally postmodernism has a new technology available to it especially the computer and other electronic machines not present earlier. What we can say then is that the post modern societies are in deep flux and great confusion and many symptoms of this have appeared especially with regard to certain kinds of affliction. Thus whole new breeds of psychiatrists are busy trying to undo the stress and

tension that post modernism is clearly associated with. Thus there is a problem of chaotic and disturbing trends of late capitalism. It is difficult to cope with multinational economy and the according cultural impact of consumerism. Jameson feels that cognitive maps are needed to deal with postmodern realities. The maps can be put together by artists novelists and working people. Thus Jameson's schema tries to build bridges between Marxian theory and post-modernism, but ended up antagonising both Marxists and postmodernists. This was to be expected because despite Jameson's efforts to synthesise it was clear that a grand theory/metanarrative was unlikely to bend backwards, and therefore, Jameson uses mainly its base/superstructure dichotomy. Jameson's postmodernism does try to maintain some basic/tenous link with Marxian theory despite the fact that Marxism is a grand narrative. However, in the case of Jean Baudrillard postmodernism is presented as a maverick social theory of contemporary times. Thus Baudrillard journey of ideas commences in the 1960's, when he started out as a Marxist critique of consumer society he was influenced by both linguistics and semiotics. However, he soon left this orientation behind him and abandoned both Marxism and structuralism.

31.8 Baudrillard and Post Modernism

In the 1970's Baudrillard alleged that Marxists and their detractors both had a similar beorgeoisie orientation which was conservative. He felt that an alternative explanation was necessary. Thus Baudrillard put forward the notion of "symbolic exchange" as an alternative to economic exchange. Symbolic exchange itself involves a continuous process of a gift giving and gift taking. It is clear that symbolic exchange was beyond and opposed to the logic of late capitalism.

Such symbolic exchange implied the creation of a society based on the same, but Baudrillard chose to be a-political. He studied contemporary society, and saw that it is not production but the electronic media that characterises it e.g. TV, computers, satellites. We have moved from societies under different modes of production to a society that is more involved with the code of production. Exploitation and profit motives have given way to a domination by the signs/systems that produce them. Again signs referred to something else but in postmodern society they become self referential and characterised by "simulations" and 'simulacra' which are representations of any aspect of consumption (Baudrillard, 1973).

For Baudrillard the postmodern world is "hyper reality." Thus media becomes more real than the reality itself, and provides news, views and events in an exaggerated, skewed, and even ideological manner – thus the term hyper reality. This is not without consequences as the real tends to be buried in the hyper real and may ultimately be banished altogether.

> **Box 31.4: Catastrophe Management**
>
> In short, there is such distortion between North and South, to the symbolic advantage of the South…..that one day everything will break down. One day, the west will break down if we are not soon washed clean of this shame, if an international congress of the poor countries does not very quickly decide to share out this symbolic privilege of misery and catastrophe. (Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, p:69).

For Baudrillard culture is undergoing a very deep change which makes the masses more and more passive, rather than increasingly rebellious. Thus the masses encounter these changes with seeming ease absorbing each new cultural idea or artifact. Thus for Baudrillard masses are not seen to be the products of media. Rather it is the media which is observed to provide these wants to the masses (for objects and entertainment). For Baudrillard society is in throes of a 'death culture.' Thus it is death anxiety that pushes people to try and lose this anxiety by using and abusing the consumerist culture. There is no revolutionary silver lining to Baudrillard's theory and the problem is also that symbolic exchange societies may exist but how to bring them about is not addressed to by Baudrillard. All in all Baudrillards brilliant and unusual ideas make it a clear breakaway from the ideas and artifacts of modernism. Baudrillard in deconstructing contemporary society shows just how much sociological theory has moved forward and away from classical thought. Thus we can see post modernism does display certain characteristics and we can see below just what these are.

The first of these characteristics is that in postmodernism that is a multiplicity of views, meanings and so on. Secondly the postmodernists are looking for polysemic and alternative meanings. Thirdly there is a distrust of metanarratives and grand narratives as found in classical sociological theory. It also holds that since there a multiplicity of perspectives there will always be many truths. Thus postmodernists regard concepts ideas as texts which are open to interpretation. They also look for binary oppositions in the text. Further, these binary oppositions are themselves shown to be false or at least not necessarily true. Finally the post modernist identifies texts, groups which are absent or omitted. This is regarded important to any 'deconstruction.'

Now postmodernism is reflected in almost all areas of life including film, TV, literature etc. which are deeply influenced by postmodern viewpoints. Let us now turn to some postmodern aspects visible in other fields. Thus in language words and forms are used and the concept of 'play' is basic to it. Thus 'play' implies altering the frame which connects ideas – allowing the troping of a metaphor. Thus the 'text' has a meaning which is understood or interpreted by the reader and not the author. This 'play' or exercise is the way that the author gains some significance in the consciousness of the reader. The problem with this postmodern view about language is very difficult to understand and is against the basis of communication where the author communicates to the reader in as lucid a manner as possible.

In literature it is found that postmodern works is not so much opposed to modernist literature. Instead it tends to extend it stylistically. Some post modern literatures include David Foster Wallace and Thomas Pynchon both of whom are critical of the vast system building of the Enlightenment modernity. As you would have noticed post structuralism and postmodernism do have an intermeshing quality. Indeed some authors straddle both fields e.g. Francois Lyotard. Further structuralism tries to build models seeking out factor and patterns that are stable, which is anathema to postmodernists and rejected outright as a futile manoeuvre. Thus postmodernism has retained the cultural dimension of structuralism but has rejected the claims to its scientificity. Again post structuralism is a position in philosophy, it is not the name of an era whereas postmodernism is associated with the post modern epoch.

31.9   Conclusion

What then has postmodernism achieved? The answer is that postmodernism has turned away the shroud over the analysis and demystified both epistemological and ideological constructs. Further a deep look at ethnography has to led to a reexamination and questioning of ethnography itself. Postmodernism and its adherents point out that sociologist should analyse the role of their own culture in the study of culture, and therefore, increase the sensitivity of the subject. Postmodern approaches have been criticised on several grounds. To begin with postmodernists are against theory. This paradoxical since this is itself a theoretical position taken by the postmodernists. Again the postmodernists emphasise the illogical or non-rational aspects of a culture. Further, the postmodern concentrates on the marginal which is itself evaluative. Then again the stress on intertextuality, but do not always follow their own advice and often treat texts as standing alone. Postmodernists also put away all assessment of theory – but this does not mean that there is no means of assessment. Thus according to postmodernists modernism is inconsistent but they themselves exercise it as and which way they want. Finally the postmodernists are self contradictory when they deny any claims of reality or 'truth' in their own writings. Finally there is the issue of postmodernism not having any confidence in the scientific method. But if sociology does follow this position, then it will turn into a study of meanings, rather than causes which influence what it is to be an individual in society.

31.10   Further Reading

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Unit 1
Social Theory and its Context

Contents

Learning objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to

- describe the context of social theory

- discuss the role of Comte, Marx Weber, and Durkheim

- describe some early British social theorists

- assess the role of context in the rise of social theory.

1.1   Introduction

Sociological theories are embedded in a particular social context, and are deeply influenced by them. Each sociological thinker or theorist has to respond to the social situation in which he or she exists and to try and make sense of the enveloping culture. That is to say that sociological theory is the sociologist's response to the context in which he lives and works. This truism will become increasingly apparent as you study the unit. However, it needs to be pointed out that there is an inner context and an outer context. The interplay between these two interrelated arenas of living creates sociological theory. The inner context is the background and mind-set of the theorist and also the strong influences and ideas that motivate a thinker to become a social theorist. The outer context is the overall environment, social and physical that the society is embedded in. However this is not to say that similar contexts cannot or do not produce competing theories. Social Theory and its Development thus take place in a particular social and psychological setting. We now give a description of the overall social context in which sociological theory developed. As is well known sociology developed first in the west and it was in the 20th century that it percolated to India.

The French Revolution in 1789 created such an urgent context that it became an important element to create a need for sociological theorising. Thus the French Revolution gave rise to many changes in that society. These changes were beneficial in the main but these were also problematic. One of these problems was the law and order maintenance in France. Some thinkers even advocated that law and order in France after the revolution was worse than what existed in the Medieval Ages. Not surprisingly the major theorists like Comte and Durkheim were deeply concerned with law and order.

Apart from the revolution in France we find another source of stimulation to the thinkers. This was the industrial revolution of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The industrial revolution was a series of developments that changed the mainly agrarian based economies to those depending on the factory or industrial system. Factory jobs were readily available in the town and there was a shift away from the countryside into industrial jobs. Not only this we find that everything had begun being influenced by rapid technological changes. These, themselves required large bureaucracies to control and give direction to the emerging capitalism, with a premise of free trade or laissez - faire. The problem with this situation was that social inequality began to become extremely disparate and while the factory owners (or capitalists) earned large profits the workers got painfully low wages. The fact of low wages led to the creation of trade unions and also to movements trying to overthrow the capitalist system itself. Thus the industrial revolution, the related capitalist structure, and the reaction against them, were enormous and these affected social thinkers greatly and we find that Marx, Weber and Durkheim were preoccupied with the problematics they unleashed.

1.2   Prominence of Socialism

Another series of factors which created a great deal of reaction was the coming into prominence of socialism. This was a direct critique of capitalism and was supported by some thinkers while a majority of them were suspicious indeed hostile to it. The main figure who supported socialism among the sociologists was Karl Marx who was not only an effective writer but also a political activist. In his political activism he was different from the armchair social theorists who were against socialism. That is they wanted to improve and streamline the capitalist systems defects, like the creation of alienation among factory workers (masterfully depicted in Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times). They did not feel that socialism was in any way an answer or solution to the ills of capitalism. It has been pointed out that Marx's socialism was often seen as a counterpoint from which to develop different theories. Now, due to the industrial revolution there were great movements of people from the rural to urban locales. These phenomena of migrations partly due to the opening up of jobs in urban areas yet this meant adjusting to the new lifestyle urban areas also saw negative factors entering into the picture, such as pollution, overcrowding, inadequate transport systems, disparities in income and so on. As a matter of fact this impacted on the religious system also with a plethora of cults coming up and some of these even predicted the 'end of the world' in the last years of the 20th century, but this did not happen. It was not surprising that early sociologists wanted to emulate the physical and biological sciences in order to get them recognition, prestige and create popularity for sociology.

Box 1.1: Context of Social Theory

We have seen something of the outer context of social theory and we would do well to see how and in which ways the thinkers who were affected by these massive changes began to start theorising within the ambit of the social environment. We now turn to the role of ideas and the relationship these have in the development of social theory. We begin with the impact of ideas during the Enlightment in France first. During the Enlightment many new ideas were introduced and replaced existing ideas. Philosophy of the 17th century and science were the major moving factors which influenced the thinkers/intellectuals of France. Some names associated with this included

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thinkers like Descartes and Locke. Later thinkers did not reject the grand systems of these thinkers but sought out ground reality instead so that ideas could have social relevance. This was very important if sociology itself was to have relevance and a presence in the analysis of society and social concerns, and bring about changes leading to social benefits spreading out to all segments of society. However, the liberalism of the Enlightenment had its own critics or what is called the 'Counter- Enlightenment' and it was the interplay between the Enlightment and the Counter-Enlightment which made possible all the ideas and theorising of early sociology.

Thus for example the counter Enlightenment ideologues, like De Bonald wanted a return to medieval times where they felt life and living was far more harmonious than the Enlightenment. Such writers were against any progressive ideology and felt that both the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution were forces that destroyed peace, harmonies, law and order (Ritwer 1996, pp:1-36). In other words De Bonald was against anything that disturbed patriarchy and the monarchy in France.

1.3 Individual vs Collectivity

Thus while the thinkers of the Enlightenment emphasised the person/ individual the reaction of those who opposed these thinkers wanted to emphasise the collectivity. Thus these thinkers wanted to point out that there was more to existence than the individual, and this was society itself. Society was viewed as one long flow from past to present and onward to the future. Further, we find that roles and relationships along with organisations were the important aspects. Again "wholeness" was vital aspect emphasising that the parts of a society were interrelated. Further, the conservative reaction abhorred social change which it felt was disruptive and could lead to societal disorder. Thus the view of institutions was wholly uncritical. Therefore, while change was leading forward to a new world the conservative reaction supported hierarchical structures, and felt it to be essential for the system of status and remuneration. These were some of the essential features that existed and had to be faced by the 'liberals'(those with the Enlightenment, that is laving a positive view of both the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution). Let us now turn briefly to some of the sociologists of the Enlightenment.

1.4 Comte and The Enlightenment

Comte's (1798-1857) pioneering work in Sociology (a term he coined) comprised partly an analysis and reaction to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Thus Comte's "positive philosophy" was aimed at what he felt to be a counter to that he considered to be the ill effects of the Enlightenment. His own approach was influenced by various counterrevolutionary thinkers such as De Bonald. Comte was, however, different from these counterrevolutionaries and he ruled out a regression to the medieval times because science had advanced too much to make that possible. On the other hand the developed an excellent theoretical system, much better than anyone else at that time.

Thus Comte's sociology of "social physics" or what he called sociology was developed as a counter to the social anarchy unleashed in France after the Revolution. He wanted to build sociology after the rigorous approach of

science especially physics. Comte's was an evolutionary theory which comprised a law which has three ascending steps or 'stages' which have a claim to universality that is they apply to all societies.

Thus in this theory we have first the

1) Theological stage (circa 1300) in which supernatural powers, and religious icons are the most important factors impacting on society, and even the world is believed to be a product of God

2) The metaphysical stage (circa 1300-1800) was one in which "nature" was held to explain everything about man and society.

3) The positivistic stage (1800-) came next and was fundamentally influenced by science, and the laws that it discovered. Thus there was no God or nature in this stage so far as explanations are concerned. Comte's position is that it is intellectual confusion that leads to social anarchy. According to him to positivistic stage dominates only when even the traces of the theological and metaphysical stages have been finally reduced if not completely eliminated from society. Only then would order prevail and the evolutionary scheme be proved correct.

Since Comte's position was evolutionary it is clear that he did not believe in violent type of revolutions (Lenzer, 1975).

Reflection and Action 1.1

Discuss and describe Comte's evolutionary scheme for the progression of society.

We can mention some other aspects of his work and this includes his observations on social structure and social change. Comte stressed the inter-relatedness of all the components of a society. He also believed that consensus in society was a major requirement. Further he did not believe in the exploitative view of the production processes i.e. capitalists and workers. Comte further recommended that there was a need for theorising and also of research. Finally Comte as a sociologist believed that sociology would ultimately emerge as a dominant force due to its excellence in understanding social processes.

1.5   Durkheim and The Enlightenment

We now turn to Durkheim (1858-1917) as the sociologist who took on the mantle from Comte who was his predecessor. Durkheim believed unlike Comte that the Enlightenment was not all negative but in fact did have some position aspects such as emphasis on scientific method. Durkheim was against anarchy and social chaos, and large positions of his work deal with studies of social order which he felt was the need of the hour.

Durkheim was a prolific writer and wrote many classical works in sociology. Thus in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) he stressed that sociology is the study of "social facts." These social facts are such that they are *external* to and *coercive* of individuals in society. This emphasis of study had a great influence on other sociologists. He demonstrated the usefullness of this approach in his study of *Suicide* (1897) in which he showed how social forces have an impact on individuals and their actions within society. His emphasis however, was not on the individual but the social causes behind it. He was keen to study differences in the suicide rate in different social

categories and groups (e.g. groups, regions, countries). According to Durkheim it was the variations within the social facts which explained different rates of suicide in different groups. Durkheim enunciated two types of social facts (a) material and (b) non material. Material facts (bureaucracy, law) differ from non material facts (social institutions and culture) and it was the latter that Durkheim focused upon in most of his work.

Box 1.2: The Division of Labour

In *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) Durkheim tried to pin down the various factors which acted as the binding glue of society. He felt that early or nascent societies had a moral basis for being integrated, and this was what he called the collective conscience. However, the more advanced society had a relatively weak collective conscience and was held together through a complex division of labour which interconnected members of society. This was, however, not without its problems and was at best a measure that had an interim effect. Nevertheless Durkheim's solution to the problems inherent in the division of labour was to suggest social reforms which could redress imbalances and keep the system going on functioning.

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* 1912/1965 Durkheim studied a primitive society so that he could find religion in a primitive form. In doing this the research would also shed light on religion in the modern world. For Durkheim society itself is the basis for religion itself. This insight implied that Durkheim was for the status quo so far as society is concerned for "society as God" is sacred and cannot be over thrown only ameliorated.

Durkheim's work ensured that sociology had made a place for itself in France by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Durkheim in 1898 set up a scholarly journal called "L'annee Sociologique" which was very successful in promoting the Durkheimian brand of sociology to the other schools and academics. Thus the context of the French Revolution and the rise of industrialisation met with an academic response in the shape of Durkheim's analysis of society. After Durkheim there was a plethora of his students and disciples who carried on the work. Thus with Durkheim and his disciples sociology rose in stature and had begun to be widely accepted in France, as a distinctive discipline.

1.6   The Marxian Ideology

Let us now turn to sociology in Germany in the same span of time. In Germany there was since the beginning a distinction between Marx and Weber and other sociologists. Thus Karl Marx (1818-1883) was himself deeply influenced by Hegel (1770-1831) but was to later contradict him. While some disciples remained with Hegel's ideas others began to criticize his system.

Hegel's philosophy emphasised the 'dialectic' and 'idealism' of which the latter was a second concept. Thus dialectic itself provides a view of the world as well as an 'image' of the world. Thus the dialectic stresses the great importance of processes including those of conflict. Similarly, the image or idea of the world is also dynamic while Marx accepted the use-value of the dialectical processes he wanted to apply it in the study of economics rather than to leave it as a concept applied to ideas alone. Further Hegel's "idealism" stressed the mind and ideas, and not the material world. That is the say it is the mind that is significant, and that the mind and psyche alone that exist. This is admittedly an extreme position and Feurbach tried to ameliorate

it by saying that Hegel had overemphasised "consciousness" and the sprit of a culture. In order to critique Hegel Feurbach pointed out that it was society that projected God and put him in a hallowed position above themselves, getting separated/distanced from God himself but nevertheless imbuing God with various uplifting attributes.

Marx though aware of Hegel's and Feurbach's positions was critical of these theories. For Marx everything could be reduced to a material base not to the mind and its processes. For Marx capitalism was the problem which led to alienation, polarisation and revolution. And for Marx revolution by the proletariat was the answer to this "evil". Marx's approach led him to the work of Ricardo and Smith who use political economists and it was these studies which finalised Marx's approach which pointed out that the profit of the capitalist was at the expense or exploitation of the wage earners/ labourers. Thus the 'surplus value' was the very basis of exploitation and the root of the capitalist system. In fact the fast growth rate of the capitalist systems siphoned off profits large enough to reinvest into the economic system (Marx, 1862).

Box 1.3: Marxian Ideology

There is a sociological theory within Marx's economic works, but Marx's radical ideas also fit into politics and it is perhaps this reason that his ideas were questioned even as he had questioned Hegel and Feurbach. That Marx's work was ideological created much opposition to it especially by the scholars with conservative learning. It was Marx's polemical style that created problems not simply the presence of ideology perse.

Marx's sociology created many critics in its wake and many works focused on the type of activist orientation that was part of his approach. There were other reasons that led to an eclipse of Marx's dialectical materialism but his ideological aspect was a major area of difficulty for other sociologists and thinkers. This radical approach was not appreciated by the conservative sociologists who had been bred to hate traces of anarchy in the social fabric — not just the disruptions of the Enlightenment or the industrial revolution. Instead Marx was fueling through his studies a mood of hostility and aggression which Marx felt would lead to a "polarisation" of classes and the poor exploited proletariat would violently dispossess the capitalist class of their factories, industries, banks and so on. Thereafter a period of social harmony would begin in which there was a societal/community ownership of the means of production. There would be an end to exploitation of the 'have-nots' by the 'haves'.

This thumbnail sketch indicates the kind of radical approach that Marx had was basically oriented to a violent overthrow of the exploiting capitalists by the exploited proletariat. Marx's emphasis therefore was on the exploitative/ oppressive nature of capitalism. His theoretical analysis was aimed at removing this aspect of capitalism. This according to Marx meant a violent, bloody anarchic kind of overthrow of capitalism. Such a revolution would by itself remove the alienation and other negative aspects of the capitalist social formation.

1.7 Weberian Ideology

We can turn now to another major German sociologist that of Max Weber (1864-19 20). It has often been observed that Max Weber developed his ideas

and theories keeping Marxian thought as a counterpoint or point of reference/ departure to begin his theorising. According to Weber Marx had developed a uni-causal theory in which every social aspect was driven or propelled forward by the economy and the economic factors. This criticism can be expressed by pointing out that Marx's theory of "economic determinism" did not go down very well with Weber, who in contrast pointed out that were several factors or causes which are at work simultaneously in a society and make it operate. In short Weber's idea was that any aspect of social process had several causes that made it operate and no single complex of factors (e.g. the economy) could be given primacy so far as social processes are concerned.

For the materialists who believed in economic determinism it was the material factor that determined ideology. However, we find that in the case of Max Weber the sequence is held to be the other way round — that is it is the ideas that determine what is done with the economy. Weber was especially concerned with the effect of religions ideas on economic development. Thus in his study on Protestantism he showed how ideas themselves are capable of generating economic development. Weber also studied other religious than Protestantism, including Hinduism of which he felt that its lower rate of economic development was due to a constricting segmentation of society into a large member of castes or *jatis*. This meant that once again the landlord or person with land holdings began to exploit the lower castes with unfair sharing of the produce if it was sharecropping and many related demands if it was possible to exploit them further. This however does not bear great depth because sociologists in the fifties conducted studies and came to the conclusion that Hinduism does not create economic impediments and caste adapts to a new economic challenge, in a positive manner. Weber was interested in how the process of rationalisation led to economic development and to the creation and existence of large bureaucracies and other social institutions (Weber, 1904). Weber was concerned with how a social actor makes decisions regarding his goals. He pointed out however, that these decisions were themselves influenced by the rules and regulations that exist in the society.

Box 1.4: Formal Rationality

Weber was concerned with what is known as formal rationality, was thus enveloped by the development of bureaucratisation. Thus Weber pointed out there are three types of authority in political structures. These are the 1) traditional, 2) charismatic, and 3) rational legal systems of authority. While the traditional systems and charismatic authority have been witnessed historically it is the rational legal system which was involved with the development of bureaucracy in the modern sense. Traditional authority derives from a sanctity of belief patterns, like that in monarchy where succession is in a line of kings. Thus the prince who becomes king by succession is an example of traditional authority. On the other hand charismatic authority is based on something "extraordinary" which the incumbent has which creates leadership. The belief among the adherents of the Charismatic leaders powers is enough for the phenomenon to exist. Thus these two types of authority are historically embedded we find that rational-legal authority is the basic modern modality of leadership. Most political systems derive leaders from a rational legal procedure e.g. the President; Prime Minister etc. of modern states generally adopt a rational legal procedure.

Ultimately Weber's theories proved more acceptable than those of Marx, especially the political and economic applications. They were liberal in some ways and conservative in other ways and unlike Marx he did not espouse total radicalism and violent revolutions in order to find a solution to the "problems" of capitalism. Weber in fact was quite against such "solutions". Thus the western sociologist found Weber reassuring after the polemical writing of Marx. Weber's writing was formal and academic and this made it easier to understand and holistic in the outlook. It is little wonder than that Weber was the most prominent German sociologist of his time. At the same time in Britain the Sociologists were also busy responding to their social context in which they were embedded. British sociologists tended to study the individual and his role in societal existence and development. Thus here sociology was built around the factors of political economy, social reform, and that of the social-evolution theory.

As regards political economy, it was a theory of capitalism which had been discussed by Adam Smith who spoke of an "invisible hand" that controlled the market forces. The market was over and above the individual and regulated his behavior. Thus the market forces were viewed as a source of social order and cohesion in society. Following this perspective the sociologist was not involved in criticizing market forces on society at large. Rather his job was to study societies, primitive and contemporary and draw out reports for use by the government to fulfill societal goals.

1.8 The British Sociologists

At this point of time British sociologists collected field based data and then combined these findings into a collective picture. The emphasis was on statistical presentation with little or no theorizing. However, the need for theorising was clearly felt by many sociologists. The statistically oriented sociologists were also extremely close to the government and therefore failed to see any flaw in the overall political and economic system.

Reflection and Action 1.2

Which were the most important early British Sociologists. Give their theories in brief.

Now there was another basic characteristic in British sociology and this was the concern for reforming individuals and then keeping them to fulfill the larger goals of society. Although these sociologists saw the flaws in the social system of the time they were nevertheless still interested in solving problems by laying the blame on individual behavior and attitudes. In following this approach these sociologists showed a high degree of respect to the society in which they were members. This was clearly a conservative stand, yet it was felt to be necessary to ward off the ogre of Marxian Socialism.

There were some paradoxes in the situation that the British sociologists found themselves in. Thus even problems such as poverty were not held to have systematic basis. Instead it was the individuals themselves, alone or in groups who were blamed for their poverty. This is a somewhat circular argument and put the individual at the centre of any kind of social ills or problems. Individual problems of many types were analysed, including factors such as 'ignorance', 'crime' or 'alcoholism'. These were all aspects of the individual especially alcoholism which was regarded yet again as an individual condition or pathology and not in any way connected to the whole of

society. As can be seen here was once again an extreme position. However, it was a matter of time that social structure became more prominent especially in the theories of social evolution. This was forwarded by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Spencer was a relative liberal and believed that the state should not interfere with the market. That is Spencer believed in laissez faire. This indicated that he was not an advocate of social reform but wanted social dynamics to be without external interventions.

1.9   Spencer's Evolutionism

Spencer was a 'Social Darwinist' and was of the opinion that society would progress by itself and that this evolution should not be interfered with. Spencer went to the extent of comparing social institutions with plants and animals. Thus he felt that social institutions would progressively adapt to their environment by themselves without any definite impetus. Spencer took Darwin's premise of "survival of the fittest" where those people who could adapt to the social and natural environment would live while those who could not so adapt met with their end (Buttel, 1990).

Spencer also saw society as an organism, in which different parts or 'organs' were interconnected and each had a role or function to perform in the overall working of the organism. Thus unlike Comte whose evolutionism was in terms of ideas, Spencer had the real material world which he wanted to explain analyse and interpret.

The evolutionary focus of Spencer is at least twofold. In the first instance Spencer speaks of the "size" factor in social evolution. Thus as the size of the society increases so do the various infrastructural and institutional need and requirements. Differentiation and specialisation begin to manifest in every sphere and the fact is that both the size and complexity of a town is very different from a metropolitan. According to Spencer the size of a society increases by various groups amalgamating and bonding to form larger societies. Thus Spencer viewed increase in size from that of a simple community to that which is complex or "compound".

Another evolutionary schema that Spencer offered was that of militant to industrial societies. Militant societies are early forms of organisation meant mainly for defense of a society or aggression towards another society. Such violent attitudes were in themselves responsible for increase in the size of a society which was so important for social evolution. Yet when industrial societies are established and warfare becomes dysfunctional and obstructs evolution. Industrial societies are noteworthy for their human interaction and high specialisation. The state is simply a monitoring agency and its basic role is to keep law and order. This is because industrial society represents in Spencer a quantum leap from militant societies and such societies move towards their own perfection. Provided a society is strongly bonded and harmonious it will survive. But if there is weak bonding and internal social fissures it would, according to Spencer, die out.

1.10 Conclusion

The early ideas of sociologists were very important indications of how the context creates an impact of the mind of the sociologist. The sociologists we have discussed were all affected by their social and psychological environment. However, as we have seen that each one of them tended to

interpret the social world in their own individualistic ways. However it would be clear to you by now that the context of theory is essentially society and culture at a particular time and place. It can then be said that social theory is in itself a reflection of the social environment and the time in which it was developed also put its stamp on the theory. Therefore, each era, each 'Age' responds with newer and more different theoretical interpretations which are the most apt for that time. There is then an 'inner' and an 'outer' context from which social theory derives. As noted in our introduction to this unit the 'inner context has to do with the individual himself and his personal way of analysing developments in the 'outer' or encapsulating society. This is not to say that is any seriality from the 'outer' to the 'inner' context. Rather they exist in an interrelationship between the individual mind and the societal developments and societal consciousness. Only when this interrelationship is clearly explained and analyzed by a thinker does social process 'inner' and 'outer' create a theory of society as a whole. It might then be said that the early social theorists and theories which they developed was a clear headed response to the social upheavals and developments, e.g. the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and so on. Finally there is a feed-forward and a feedback effect in each situation which can partly help explain the rising of early social analysis and their implications.

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Unit 2
Concept and Theory

Contents

Learning objectives

After having read this lesson you should be able to,

▫ Link concept and theory

▫ Learn about concept and sociological theorems

2.1   Introduction

▫ Common day experiences provide the starting point for understanding words by a group of speakers in the same sense; as knowledge grows more technical, the words are defined for their properties and examples of how a scientific vocabulary develops are given.

▫ Technical meaning of words is commonly understood and we call them concepts.

▫ Concepts are then used to signify a relationship with one an other like various measurements of medical tests that ultimately lead to a conclusion — normal or pathological state.

▫ Such concepts are used in physics, chemistry and biology as well and they help in the measurement of things/forces, formation of equation and conduct of experiments.

▫ Social sciences have limited scope for experiments, but indirect experiments through comparative method are used.

▫ Differences in societies and groups are significant for explaining their effects on human actions.

▫ At times universality of explanations works, at others uniqueness and historical setting becomes significant.

▫ There is greater use of history on social sciences than of natural science for the conduct of fresh studies.

▫ Concepts in interaction lead to the formulation of theory, that needs constant revisions.

▫ Examples have been given from Durkheim and Weber; Parsons and Merton.

▫ Students are advised to enrich examples from own experience and related lesson units.

2.2   Words and Language

As human beings we use language to describe analyse and evaluate our

actions and convey our ideas, feelings and concerns. We interact through words and a group of words we call sentences, there are other persons who do the same. We understand the words they use. Gradually, we begin to use a word that means or signifies same objects to all in a community. Language is a social product. Words are given a meaning and that meaning is commonly accepted by others. Thus, social interaction gets facilitated. A story is fold about nine different lineages living in separate valleys of the Naga in the north eastern India. They sat down to take a thing (in local dialect). Others did not understand which thing was wanted. Then each of them opened a small packet. It contained salt; but salt was described in nine different words. So we can understand the value of one word meaning or signifying the one chosen object. Two more examples will help. The word chair indicates a piece of furniture used for being seated. At a time in the Parliament, members used to sit on benches. Those who were in the government and controlled the finances were said to occupy 'Treasury Benches', those on the other side were seated on 'opposition benches' and the person who was addressed as 'The Chair'. Here objects are associated with positions and the meaning understood by persons occupying those seats. In the court 'The Bench' signifies the judges. The lawyers are separated by a bar from the dias. Lawyers are thus said to belong to the 'bar'. Here again objects : the bar and the bench, get associated with their respective position of persons who are differentiated from each other, in cricket the white coat used to indicate the umpire. Different dress codes are laid down for different ranks in the army and the police.

When one word is used many times to convey the same meaning, it becomes possible for other persons to share it and thereby to communicate with each other. Even signs can be used to convey 'yes' or 'no'. In Andhra Pradesh, if one move the head or the neck from left to right, it means 'yes'; in northern India that means 'no', whereas for 'yes' the movement has to be up and down. Showing 'thumb up' in the west means 'ready to go'; in the traditional Indian setting, it stands for discarding the other. In Hindi 'thenga dikha diya' means 'I damn care for you'. These few examples show there is a need for a shared meaning of words/signs to be able to communicate with each other. Human beings are distinguished from animals for possessing the capacity to have language for interaction.

Box 2.1: Consensual Meaning

This is most effectively done when words have the same meaning that is understood by all at least in a defined group. It has to be understood that the choice of a word for describing is a human activity. Things are described through an agreed meaning of words. Some writers refer this as an inter-subjectivity agreement among persons. They deny any objectivity to things. In this sense reality is a social construct. This view has been put forward by philosophers from Vienna and carried forward through their influence.

Karl Popper and Wallerstein's names are among of the foremost among than, as scholars from that significant academic centre got spread over to English speaking countries making their mark in Philosophy Economics, and Sociology, and might of them brought up in the classical trends of music continue to illustrate the argument from the same. Be it recalled that German as a language linked the scholarly traditions of Austria and Germany.

2.3 The Nature of Concepts

When scientists use a word, it gets a technical meaning. It becomes a concept. In referring to a human being, biologists use the phrase 'homosapiens' or 'wise man' to describe the modern man. If a person falls ill, in common language people say he / she has got fever. As discoveries get advanced, words like 'malaria' 'influenza' indicate the nature of the fever. They also describe which parts or insects have affected the body. Then we understand the nature and causes of the disease. The next step is finding the care for the same through the use of tablets or injections. So when fever or disease is described in terms of its components and their behaviour or misbehaviour is known, we begin to know how things or bodies associated and recognised get inter related. Each measurement helps the physician to analyse the nature of the disease. Thus, temperature, blood pressure, 'sugar' or blood sugar content is urine can be measured. Each of these words and their measurements have a definite meaning, thus tests can be carried out by persons other than physicians; the words that describe each measurement become concepts and are commonly understood is the same sense by technicians. A common understanding helps locate the normal and pathological distribution of the bodies or anti-bodies and their particular combinations tell how they lead the physician to determine the disease and where to look for a cure.

Chemistry as a science came into its own when the atom was discovered as the smallest particle of matter that could take part in a chemical reaction. Atomic Weight of Hydrogen was taken to be 1 and of Oxygen 2; thereby weights for 92 elements were calculated. These were arranged in a table called the Atomic table. Further, researchers on unstable elements carried their number to 110. The elements could mix up in a reaction soon it was found that there was no loss of weight in a chemical reaction. This was a theoretical statement. Atomic weight was a concept. The inter relations among concepts that could be proved to hold is a number of trials or experiments became a theoretical proposition. Further, inter relation among such theoretical conclusions became a part of theory. The chief characteristic of theory is that it constitutes a series of conclusions stated in terms of concepts and their inter relations. Thus theoretical proposition gets linked to others and one/all taken together constitute the theory in a subject.

The process of theory formation then requires the following steps:

i) Identification of the smallest unit and its characteristics.

ii) The interactions among these units that lead to the formation of compounds and complexes in determinate ways.

iii) Statements that use concepts and their interrelations to indicate the nature of interactions and their results.

iv) Frequent experimentation to arrive at the stated results; and if results show a difference. Then, explain the difference and arrive at a revised statement.

Box 2.2: Conceptual Abstraction

A little further explanation of a concept is in order. We do not see a concept. We arrive at a concept. It is an abstract. When we see a person and come to know his/ her name, it is described as a proper noun. Som Nath or Abul Kalam are proper names but when they refer to the speaker of the Lok

Sabha or the President of India, we are referring to their characteristics. Thus speaker, or president are abstractions. Pushpa may be the name of teacher and Shashi the name of a student. Here again, teacher and student are abstractions. We arrive at abstractions by converting proper nouns into common nouns. Sachin and Kaif are cricketers, and Gulam Ali a musician and so on. Can you try to convert the following places into their characteristics. Delhi, Mumbai, Bhopal; choose from among the following : a port city, a national capital a state capital. Match the characteristics. The second list is of abstractions.

2.4   Concepts in Sociology: Some Illustrations

Now let us look at some concepts that sociologists use frequently.

We use one word to signify one object or a meaning. We use different words to signify other objects. Thus we try to have same meaning for describing similar things; different words to make differences clear. Human beings can be put into different categories eg. Male, female. Brother and Sister belong to the same generation. Father and son to different generations; So do mother and …..(You try).. and add your own example…. mother-in-law and (1) ………. in law (2) ………in law. Thus we begin to describe a relationship among two persons. These relations are found among many such units of two persons. Relations among two persons are called dyadic (di means two); the unit of two persons is called a dyad. Radcliffe Brown, a British social anthropologist suggested that the first social relationship is dyadic in nature.

When we talk of a relationship, we ask a question: Is the relationship limited to one event or is it repeated time and again? Then we raise a second question: Is the relationship limited to two persons only, or many people in similar situations are involved in it. 'A student-teacher' relationship is found among two persons, but then there are many teachers and many students. There is a common acceptance that students will get related to teachers in some defined way. Here let us introduce a few concepts : A student in getting related to the teacher performs a **Role**. It gets defined when repeated time and again it acquires a **pattern**. This **pattern** is expected to be performed, An individual performing the role has been defined as a **person** by Nadel. Let us go ahead. The **role** of a student is performed by many students. Hence Nadel says one role is performed by many individuals: or a person is many individuals. Now our individual enters into more than one interrelationship every day. In the family he may be a brother or a sister of some one else. Next he may a son related to father, a son related to mother, and in a three generation family, a grandson related to the grandparents ……. and so on. This situation is described (or conceptualised) by saying that one individual is many **persons**.

2.5   Concepts to Theorems: Natural Sciences

It is useful to recall the difference between arithmetic and algebra. In the first case, we try to solve every question that is posed to us. Add two sums, three sum and so……on, or exercises 1, 2, 3 is subtraction; or to go further to multiplication and division. Each exercises is solved individually. In algebra, we have a formula or a method of solving a problem. If $(a + b)$ is multiplied by $(a + b)$, we start with a in the first set and get the following results: $a \times a + a \times b = a^2 + ab$. Then we start with b of the first set and multiply

with each letter, we get b $\times$ a + b b or ba + b^2. Now we add both the results. We get a^2 + 2ab + b^2. So we have a formula (a+b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2 and likewise we can go to (a + b)^3 to get further results. But let us remain with the first sum. (a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2. This formula will be valid for all the values of a & b; it can be that a = 2 and b = 3; and our results will be 2^2 + 2.2.3 + 3^2 = 4 + 12 + 9 = 25. We can go on increasing the value of a or b and get the desired results. Here we need not calculate each exercise, but use this formula to answer various values of a or b, be they 4 and 5; or 7 and 9......and so on. The algebraic exercise applies to many cases. This is something like discovering a principle or a common method for doing each calculation individually. The discovery of a method common to several cases of a type is a step forward in evolving a formula, something like a theorem.

Let us now move to a set of theorems. Remember our school days learning geometry. We learn about a point, a line, an angle, a triangle — then say a triangle has three angles and their sum is 180º. If one angle is of 90º, the other two have to share the remaining 90º in any combination - say 60º and 30º or 45º and 45º. In the latter case two sides will be equal in length. If all the three angles are of 60º each, each side of the triangle with also be equal in length. Here a relationship is posited between the degree of the angle and the length or size of a side. We can go on further to read about triangles and quadrilaterals..... and reach the connected 28 theorems. The inter connection of theorems then leads to theory in general, or an all bracing theory.

Reflection and Action 2.1

Read section 2.5 and give your explanation, interpretation and commentary.

In the example last given words like a point, a line or a straight line, and angle are concepts, Their interconnection a theorem. The interrelation among them a theory.

In natural sciences, say in Physics and Chemistry, we come across words (Concepts). Their interrelations and then inter connections among concepts (expressed in quantities) that lead to theory or better 'laws'. We take an example of an apple. It fell down from the tree, a normal occurrence. But Newton asked the question why did the apple fall to the ground. He propounded the theory of gravity. not apple alone, but all objects fall towards the ground. If the earth is round then why do people on the other side of the earth do not fall away. This doubt was expressed by our villagers — why do the Americans on the other side of the globe do not fall away. Newton had an answer. All things fall towards the centre of the earth. This explained all falls. Thus the theory of gravity came into being; The explanation come with Newton — though apples or other objects had been falling that way ever since the creation of the earth. Here we can sum up the process of theory formation.

- Theory is an explanation of recurring even to and is a valid explanation universally in space and time.

- The condition under which the theoretical statement would hold true need to be spelt out.

- The theory can be modified if subsequent experiments create new situation that have to be considered afresh. The theory is a revisable

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proposition. Examples are the theory of the atom being indivisible part of matter had to be revised after the splitting of the atom. The case of discovery of elements beyond 92 has earlier been stated. The theory of gravity was given a new look when a non-matter or a force like light was found to be subject to gravity by Einstein.

▫ Science is impersonal in the sense that the laws and theories do not depend for their truth value on the status of a person, be he a king, a prime minister, priest or even the scholar himself/ herself.

▫ When an inquiry is conducted or a problem solved on the basis of existing knowledge about concepts and theory and illustrated as a case of a more general application, it is called a deductive approach. We move from theory to facts.

▫ When we move from facts and arrive at an explanation that process is called induction.

▫ The inter-play between inductive and deductive processes constitutes the method of science, or sciencing. Here conclusions are only provisional, and are under consent testing and revision. As a process body of science consists of revisable propositions.

▫ Some authors are of the opinion that science grows double, say every 10 years, and after 50 years quite a few conclusions or theoretical statements need modification.

2.6 Towards Social Science: Durkheim, Weber and Beyond

There has been a lot of discussion whether social sciences can follow the method of natural sciences. These need separate discussion. Comte 'Durkheim, and Radcliffe-Brown answered 'yes'. Dilthey, a historian took the other view. Weber tried to follow the middle path. On different occasions systems of explanation have been tried and these have been called 'grand theories' which could be applied to several inquiries / cases. At least that is the claim. Marxism and Parsonian systems belong to that category. Then there are descriptions at an empirical level — facts gathered and put into tables, without any explanation. These are not theories *per se* but theories can be made through proper analysis. Durkheim's study of suicide rates and explanation of their variations is the best example of theory formation from the existing data. It will be helpful to understand his method:

▫ Firstly, Durkheim clarified the term, and located three (or four) types of suicides and their nature.

▫ For each type, the existing data available in official records were classified in terms of their distribution in various social categories. This classification needed intelligence and brilliance of the author.

▫ Each type of suicide rate varied according to the data on social facts, and comparisons were made.

▫ Explanations were given for each type.

▫ A theory of suicides was formulated in terms of the variations of the degree of integrated (solidarity) in society.

Let us recall how Max Weber formulated his theories:

▫ The key words: 'The protestant ethic' and 'capitalism' were defined after going through the literature. Their ideal types were defined.

- Cases where both were present, and not present were identified.
- Comparisons in the historical settings were attempt and existing data on the type of education prevalent in each religious group were compared.
- A conclusion on the coincidence of the rise of capitalism in protestant dominated regions was confirmed.
- Why this inter relationship holds is examined.
- How is the explanation of this case related to the general history of civilizations is attempted.

Path breaking studies such as these continue to receive attention among scholars from related subjects as well as the main discipline over a period of time. It happens that certain parts of a theory receive greater attention is subsequent studies. Durkhiemian studies on suicide received attention at the hands of psychologists and social psychologists in particular and they began re-examining the loss of sense of security as a possible explanation, besides others. One of the types of suicide was classified as ramomic. A group of writers considered this concept as central to the analysis of modern societies. In turn they began to de-link the concept from that of solidarity, introduced more psychological variables in it; while Merton retained the social component as control. Thus succeeding social scientist find an alternative relevance of the concept and try to look problem of a different age through it (with some modifications).

a) Max Weber

The second example refers to Max Weber. His treatment of the protestant ethic gave rise to the counter-point at the hands of writers treating the Catholic, Hindu, Shinto and Confucian faiths suggesting a sort of 'negation of negation'. Marxaist scholars prin pointed on 'structural' factors as being more decisive than the 'cultural' as propoureded by Weber. Yet most of the Asian dialogue on entrepreneurship kept alive the debate with Weber within the cultural frame. Mario Rutten in the article on the 'Study of Entrepreneurship in India' ….. neatly summarizes the position and calls for greater interaction among the two major approaches (2003 : 1319-41). There have been ample discussion on Weber v. Marx, and a sort of convergence signifying Marx and Weber as complements of each other. Yet other variations of Weber are found in the conceptualisation of ethno-methodology and phenomenology wherein actor's point of is being given primacy over 'others'. Within Marxism one comes across increasing emphasis on empirical studies of the sub-altern as well as other political forms of dominance. The classical writers who developed ways of looking at social facts, currents, and actions, in their own times, are being increasingly discovered for their relevance to addressing the problems of the new societies, or our contemporary periods. This dynamism constitutes the process of science linking concepts and theories of the classical writers and modern situations.

b) Parsons and Merton

Among the twentieth century writers Talcott Parsons is the most significant for conceptualising human actions and connecting economy, polity, institutions and pattern maintenance. This exercise required contribution from economics anthropology, psychology and sociology, and their integration into a general theory of action. As Parsons grew mature, he examined economy, polity, family and professions, specially medicine, as sub –systems and in cooperation with valued colleagues looked into specifics of the American society. In

discussing writers of significance spread over a life time, with some contributions appearing posthumously, a question is raised about the continuity of the academic effort involved. Critics at times find that 'the young' author was different from the 'mature' 'one; the 'younger' being more general and the 'mature' being more specific. This is what one gets by looking at Marx with 1848 serving as the dividing line, more or less. The *Philosophical* manuscript and the *communist Manifests* belong to that period, the *Capital* to the next. A similar exercise on Parsons suggests that the publication of *Towards a General Theory of Action'*, (1936) and to an extent *Social System* mark the first phase.

c) Theories of Society

Thereafter specifics gained currency, and the treatment got manifestly grounded in the empirical situation of the American Society. We have hinted at the influence Parsons had on Indian scholarship in a different unit. Some critics commented upon Parsons as if he was guilty of using too many concepts to state his position and synthesize the effects. Their use earned him more critics than supporters. Yet from among the galaxy of his students and co-workers. We get more and more specific studies of various aspects of society.

Merton was among the most serious of the students who attempted a fresh combination of empirical studies and grand theory taking some aspects selectively at a time. Harry M. Johnson passed on the gains of the entire approach in a test book entitled *Sociology,* which get translated in Hindi by Yogesh Atal who had spent a semester with Merton. Other writers studies the family, religion, economy and polity. Merton is important for having coined the phase 'theories of the middle range' — middle between grand theory and pure description. He thought at that level, theory had a heuristic purpose i.e. acting as a guide for further research (including field studies). Accordingly, he systematised classical explanation for use as tools of research of modern societies and to an extent modified old concepts giving them a new relevance and vibrancy. He did this for 'function' by pin pointing three categories, function, dysfunction and non-function and to look for a' balance of consequences' of the three. He devised a protocol of for observation' that would permit gathering of information with a potential for being understood in the functional perspective. At the conceptual level, he had a fresh look at the analysis a comparison between the sociology of knowledge, and at the level of nature cosmopolitan and local press. He clarified social aspects of anomie, the conflict between the accepted goals of a society and the use of rather open means for achieving the same; and then the specification of the Theory of the 'Role-Set'' and the 'Reference Group' as examples of middle range theory developed at different stages of the inquiry. Merton's other contribution lay in attempting some questions set by financing agencies; and using the opportunity for developing concepts that would acquire explanatory power in the broad frameworks of *Social Theory and Social Structure.* In the preface to a volume an *social problems*, he distinguished between social problems and sociological problems, a point well taken by M.S. Gore in most of his presentations and deliberation in the Indian setting.

Conceptualising for studying special features of the Indian society has been attempted by M.N. Srinivas through 'SANSKRITIZATION' and 'Dominant Caste'. Adrian C. Mayer found it useful to study municipal elections in Dewas town of Madhya Pradesh through the operation of quasi-groups (half formed groups)

for a specific situations in the nature of 'actions sets'. There is an increasing trend in sociology in India for showing the limits within which some of the concepts made popular in the west can help us grasp the nature of social processes operating in India. 'Little community' and 'Peasant society' are some of the examples and others can be added.

2.7 Conclusion

Words and concepts are products of mind, and when their meaning is shared, communication of ideas takes place in daily life as well as in academic circles. The development of science made the meanings more and more specific, as also grammar and logic. Natural sciences connect concepts with experiments, and conclusions affect the inter connection among various concepts, and their combinations. Science keeps on growing and doubling itself faster than social sciences or humanities. History of ideas is more significant for the latter, as old formations and theories are discovered to provide insight into current problems. Yet, refinements keep on happening. This has been illustrated chiefly with respect to the methods and approaches used by Durkheim and Weber; and the nature of the middle range theories initiated by Merton over the grand theories of Parsons. In the body of the Unit, the manner in which words like structure and function have developed has been briefly touched upon. Students are advised to study the related material supplied in specific unit. Merton also developed 'protocols' for observation, and paradigms for studying questions in a theoretical or structural perspective. The next lesson deals with the Paradigms and Theories.

2.8 Further Reading

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Unit 3
Theory and Paradigm

Contents

Learning Objectives

After having studied this unit you should be able

▢   discuss the meaning of theory

▢   compare the contributions of Marx Durkheim and Weber to social theory

▢   describe classical and contemporary theories.

3.1   Introduction

In simple words theory refers to the explanation of general principles of an art or science which is constructed with practice. It is true that on the basis of practice we derive certain rules and at times we are able to separate these rules from whatever we have seen in practice. Thus we begin to differentiate between theory and practice. Theory is generally helpful in explaining practice, theory refers to the much higher level of abstraction whereas practice to the empirical situation. If we look at the relationship between theory and practice then broadly speaking there emerge two possibilities like: (i) theory and practice might be seen as quite distinct from each other and (ii) theory and practice might be conceived as complementary to each other. According to the first point of view it seems necessary to make a distinction between theory and practice. Thus we come across the statements like it is a very good idea in theory but in practice it just might not work. According to this point of view theory and practice are two quite different things. According to the second point of view it appears that theory and practice are not two different things but can help in understanding each other. From our point of view although it is important to understand the difference between theory and practice, but there is a need to see the relationship between the two. In fact both theory and practice constitute a whole which could well be examined in its own right. However, all this concerns with the general understanding of the term theory, which is often contrasted with practice. But in the area of logic and philosophy the term theory has been treated in a slightly different way. Accordingly, theory refers to a set of interrelated propositions. Proposition refers to the statement which could be proved either true or false. Here the emphasis should be given to the nature of the statement itself which bears the quality of being

proved true or false. In our daily life — experiences we come across such statements which could neither be proved true nor false. Such statements are to be kept out of the preview of proposition as well as theory. In the process of theory-building it seems necessary to formulate propositions carefully. Hence the proposition must be formulated in such a way so that it bears the quality of being falsified. Such an approach is very much helpful in formulating not only sociological theories but also reflects its required scientific status. The basic quality of scientific research is that it progresses forward through the process of falsification, it means that in the light of new data, the existing theories are tested again and again. Till these existing theories are found capable of explaining the data, they don't face any kind of challenge to them. But if these theories fail to explain the new data, they begin to be questioned. The community of scientists is busy in continuously examining these existing theories in the light of the new data. The moment these existing theories fail to explain the new data, these theories are put under a question mark and sometimes these theories can be rejected — also paving the way for new theories to take their place. Rejection of the existing theories is known as 'falsification' and scientific research proceeds ahead through this process. Here we would like to return back to our original question concerning the structure of theory itself. As discussed earlier any theory is composed of a certain number of interrleated propositions. These propositions normally display the conditions that they could be falsified and this very condition of propositions bring them on the track of scientific research. Thus before constructing any proposition we must ensure that it fulfills the conditions of falsifiability so that it could be accommodated well in theory. After this we shall try to understand the nature, meaning and types of sociological theories.

3.2   Sociological Theories

Broadly speaking, the discussion on the nature, meaning and types of sociological theories could be divided into five parts. In the first part we shall try to understand the nature and meaning of the sociological theories during its classical age or period. Considerable amount of work was done by the pioneers of sociology during this period to establish the credentials of the discipline. Sociology could well emerge as a separate discipline only due to the great efforts made by prominent scholars in its classical age. Next, in the second part we shall discuss about the nature and types of contemporary sociological theory. In fact, this period reflects to the time when the subject sociology could come out of its classical period both chronologically as well as conceptually. During this period certain important advances were made in sociology and some of the shortcomings of the classical period were also addressed to. In the third part there is a discussion on the recent advances made in sociological theories. Here we come to see of sociology not only emerging as a new discipline but also maturing as a subject. During this period sociology got established as an important mature and independent subject having its own identity. Next, in the fourth section, we shall come to know about theories and perspectives in sociology that characterise the subject with some new efforts and rigour and here we shall see how several doubts over the nature and types of sociological theories were clarified. After this, in the fifth part we shall examine how certain challenges were put forward before the sociological theory and how it responded to such problems and challenges. But one point can be added here that although sociological theory as it exists today has been able to overcome many obstacles and problems in its own way, but nevertheless this has never been an easy task to do so.

3.3   Classical Sociological Theories

The period of classical sociology belongs to the era when sociology emerged as a new discipline with the one central assertion that the scientific study of society is possible. Prior to that period philosophers, intellectuals as well as layman thought of and conceived of society in their own ways but the science of society could not emerge out. Philosophers' reflections, literary romanticism and criticism and people's own individual conceptions about society had been the characteristics of the era prior to the emergence of sociology. Although intellectuals belonging to different streams of thought as well as common people have had reflected upon the nature of society but their efforts were primarily individual efforts. On the other hand society had existed for a longer duration which displayed its own internal statics and dynamics. How does society behave as an entity in itself? How can it be studied scientifically? Can it be done? If yes then how? All such questions dominated the earlier era in the development of sociological theory. This era belongs to what is today known as classical sociological theory. The following discussion refers to the same.

The term sociology was coined by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) a French sociologist and philosopher. He is also known as father of sociology. Although he has made some significant contributions to the subject — a part of which shall be discussed here too, but the most creditable work done by him related to his efforts in establishing sociology as a scientific as well as an independent discipline. Before him instead of sociology, we rather had philosophy, literature and art through which reflections on society were used to be made. Thus, in other words how society could be conceived of philosophically, literally or through art had been the only available ways and tools to reflect upon society. The modern method of scientific-analysis of society as suggested by Auguste Comte was not just available before him. Therefore, the contributions of Auguste Comte must be seen as the pathbreaking ones helping to establish sociology as a new and independent discipline in its own right. Auguste Comte, in short discussed at length, of course philosophically to argue that the scientific study of society is possible and when such efforts succeeded the new subject would be known as sociology. What we must realise at the moment is the simple fact that this had never been an easy task. After establishing sociology as a new and independent scientific discipline, Auguste Comte had made some of his own contributions to it. Auguste Comte's own contributions to the subject sociology are referred to, although briefly, in the following discussion.

3.4   Law of Three Stages

Having established sociology as a separate and independent discipline, Auguste Comte divided sociology into two parts known as social statistics and social dynamics, former dealing with the questions of equilibrium in society and letter with the problems of change in society. Auguste Comte has also referred to hierarchy of sciences like : astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology. He was of the opinion that sociology can't be reduced to other sciences be it mathematics (especially statistics), biology or political economy. Auguste Comte has also talked about the law of three stages namely theological, metaphysical and scientific. According to him, every society passes through these three stages. In the theological stages all the explanations concerning the events happening in nature were attributed to God who was supposed to be in full command of the situation. The second

state i.e. metaphysical refers to the transitional stage where neither as the events taking place in nature were considered neither as a supernatural act nor as based upon scientific explanations. This sort of transitional stage existed somewhere around fourteenth century. The third stage is known as scientific stage, where neither theological nor metaphysical sort of explanations about society are considered sufficient. In the scientific stage of society the explanations are examined rigorously and no explanation is considered as a final one. Each explanation is considered as valid explanation only for the time being until a better explanation arrives on the scene. Auguste Comte believed that scientific methods could be applied for the study of society as well. The assertions like that one although look simple but it actually contains an important philosophy, widely known as positivism. It was the philosophy of positivism which dominated the academic scene not only in France but over the entire Europe. In fact the name of Auguste Comte has been associated with the philosophy in such a way that it is sometimes considered as the only important contribution that he had made as it cut across the geographical boundaries of France and the academic limits of the discipline of sociology. The scholars from some other disciplines have commented widely on the notion of positivism. Auguste Comte suggested that his scientific method for the study of society would be based upon comparison, observation and experiment. Auguste Comte has explained these and allied concepts in detail, but in short it could be said that he was able to establish sociology as a new scientific as well as an independent subject. Although it was Auguste Comte who had made the earlier but essential beginnings, it was Emile Durkheim who carried forward the fate of sociology by providing it new strides. His contribution to sociological theories is discussed next.

Box 3.1: Durkhermian Approach

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a prominent sociologist from France continued with the tradition of positivism established by his predecessor fellow countryman and sociologist Auguste Comte. In a sense we can say that Emile Durkheim continued from where Auguste Comte had left. Durkheim was still grappling with the questions like whether it was possible to apply the laws of natural sciences for the scientific study of society or not and his answer to this question was surely in the affirmative. Emile Durkheim went ahead and virtually demonstrated how could it actually be done. He elaborated his sociological approach in his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*.

Although his book deals with some of the complicated details regarding what according to him would be the sociological approach in future, but one illustration might be given here, Durkheim's method of social analysis emphasises on the study of what he calls it, 'social facts'. His discussion on social facts not only clarifies his methodological as well as theoretical formulations but also helps in establishing sociology as a new, important and independent scientific discipline. In fact we can say that the first serious sociological formulation in the history of the subject begins with Durkheim's detailed treatment of the idea of 'social fact'. His other formulations like the division of labour in society, the study of suicide, the notion of elementary forms of religious life and views on education and sociology are all concerned with the formulations built around social facts. We shall briefly attempt to understand some of the issues related to the notion and methodology concerned with the formulation of social facts. According to Durkheim, "social facts are ways of feeling, thinking and acting commonly spread among the

people, external to individual and exercising a constraint upon him". This quite compact notion might appear difficult to understand and comprehend. But we shall attempt to explain some of the complex issues related with it. These social facts are different from facts concerning us at the individual or the psychological level. Additionally, Durkheim has also clarified that these social facts are 'external' and exercise constraints upon individuals. According to him we can identify these social facts when we attempt to go against them. Some of the social facts identified by Durkheim himself in his various research works are like: rate of crime, rate of suicide, division of labour in society and religion. How to use these social facts for the purpose of social-analysis? In this context Durkheim has given two clues: one, he suggests that social facts should be treated as 'things' and two, one social fact must be explained with another social fact preceding it. In this, way Durkheim has tried to achieve mainly two objectives : one, to ensure that sociology virtually becomes a scientific discipline and two, to take care that sociology remains as an irreducible subject and doesn't split into several parts belonging to other subjects. Durkheim has also referred to 'normal' and 'pathological' aspects of society in this context. Durkheim's approach regarding how to deal with various theoretical and methodological issues could be seen in his book. *The Rules of Sociological Method* in detail. After understanding the theoretical contributions of Emile Durkheim, we shall try to explain the efforts of yet another pioneering scholar Karl Marx.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a philosopher, social scientist as well as a sociologist from Germany. The academic scholarship of Karl Marx is widely known throughout the world. Although Marx attempted to solve several academic problems, he never claimed to be a sociologist. What is today known as the Marxist sociology is based upon his various formulations that are basically sociological in nature. In other words, we have to find out or make out the sociological contents from his writings. This additional task has been done by the sociologists at later stages. Marx's theoretical formulations that were basic for him and useful for sociologists are referred here. Some of the basic formulations of Marx include : historical materialism, classes and class-struggles, theory of surplus value and alienation. Marx's formulations provided a departure from the earlier discussed engagements for sociological analysis. Marx's theory was also used as a political ideology by various Leftist political parties of the world and a sizable part of the world had been under the rule of the communist parties of the world till recently. In and around 1989 several political — systems in different countries belonging to the 'Second World' collapsed at the end of the cold war period between the two then existing superpower countries. All such countries had practiced Marx's theoretical formulations as their political guidelines.

Marx's theoretical formulations reflect a departure from the ones by the previously discussed authors by exhibiting one major point. Marx's method includes the principles of 'dialecties' which was not discussed by any of the sociologist earlier. As in principle the use of the notion of dialectics was not an entirely a new discovery by Marx, it was used earlier by his fellow countryman G.W.F. Hegel. What was significant and new in Marx's theoretical formulation was materialistic interprelation of society with the help of dialectical method. As in the case of Hegel, he saw the progress of society through idealism, achieved through dialectics, in the case of Marx the progress of society was possible through materialistic dialectics. Another significant departure in the writings of Marx was his emphasis on the historical method. When the principle of dialectics was applied for the study of history, it was

called historical materialism. Materialistic interpretation of society mainly includes the social situation, which helps in shaping-up the ideas of people. At some places the notion of historical materialism has been used interchangeibly with that of dialectical materialism. Marx's emphasis on history and dialectics was also related to his formulations on classes and class-struggles. Karl Marx alongwith his academic collaborator and lifelong friend. Friedrich Engels, had clarified that all the known periods of history upto present time could be seen as having class-struggles. For example, according to Marx and Engels in the slave society we have classes like masters and slaves, in the feudal society there are feudal lords and serfs and in the capitalist society we have capitalists and workers. These are the main classes struggling against each other for the sake of ownership and control over means of production.

Box 3.2: Working Class

Marx and Engels could however, foresee the victory of the working class which was struggling against the capitalist class. There are several other issues that are discussed by Marx and Engels especially in the context of capitalist society like exploitation, theory of surplus-value, alienation and the revolutionary potential of the working class. With the victory of the working class Marx and Engels could foresee the emergence of the socialist society, which would be the society without any class and finally coming of the communist society. In the writings of Marx we can see a lot of clarity of thought, new interpretations about society, progressive ideology and a call for the emancipation of people in general. Although Marx has written extensively, his ideas have been coherent as well as precise. The importance of his ideas and its application has been important to such an extent that almost no sociological interpretation of the existing reality was considered complete until and unless it has examined the phenomenon from the Marxist perspective.

After understanding the theoretical formulations of Karl Marx, we shall try to know about the contributions of yet another scholar namely Max Weber.

3.6 Weberian Ideology

Max Weber (1864-1920) was a prominent sociologist from Germany who belonged to the era of classical period in sociology. Max Weber is known in sociology for his brilliant writings on a variety of topics. Max Weber gave a new direction to sociology to which he offered, different as well as new ways of thinking and research. His ways of thinking and analysis were different from Auguste Comte or Emile Durkheim. In our opinion Max Weber presented his ideas which were basically concerned with the German sort of understanding but still reflecting the European and the Western flavour. Max Weber has written on a variety of topics from social action to bureucracy and also contributed in the vital areas like methodology of social sciences. Although Max Weber attempted to define sociology in his own terms and ways, certain formulations made by him like Verstehen still require clarifications. Sociologists are still struggling with the idea of how exactly to proceed on the lines of thought developed by Max Weber.

Reflection and Action 3.1

Outline the ideologies of Marx and Weber. What are the commonalities in these sociologists.

How to go for experimentation with some of the formulations developed by Max Weber like social action, Verstehen or phenomenology ? It still remains an area where much remains to be understood and subsequently done. However, some success has been achieved for example around the conceptions like bureaucracy. Max Weber's concepts of course carry higher values in terms of its theoretical contents, but its actual operationalisation has largely remained a problematic area. Max Weber for example defined sociology as an interpretative understanding of social action. Max Weber continued to speak of social as having two qualities : one, while doing such an action, the actor must take into account the presence of another actor and wholly or partially be guided by it and two, the actor must attach a subjective meaning to it. Max Weber has also written about the subjectivity versus objectivity issues in social sciences. His ideas about the importance of Verstehen and ideal-types are brilliant and excellent in terms of its theoretical value and rigor. But how to make them operational at the practical and empirical level still remains a problematic area. On the one hand the subject sociology has been widely enriched by the writings at the theoretical level but otherwise not much has been achieved at the experimental level as Max Weber during his own lifetime worked on different topics without clarifying much on the topics on which he himself had worked earlier. However, Max Weber's formulations on the Protestant ethics and its relationship with the rise of capitalism are widely accepted and acclaimed. Max Weber was able to demonstrate in his study that there was a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the development of capitalism. We must ensure making before any sort of a sweeping generalisation that Max Weber had presented it as a unique case in the context of Western Europe only. In spite of his brilliant ideas, Max Weber's work has to some extent remained unexposed due to various reasons. But in spite of all this there is no doubt that Max Weber's formulations have contributed to a large scale in the area of developing sociological theories. Thus after examining the theoretical contributions of some of the classical authors like Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber, here we come to the end of the contributions made by these scholars in the classical era of the development of sociology. After this we shall attempt to see the contributions made by the sociologists in the contemporary period.

The contemporary period of modern sociological theories could be seen as an important departure from its classical period. During the classical period the central question has been to establish sociology as an independent discipline but during the contemporary period the main concern has been not only to come out of that classical image, but also to carry on the subject further. During this contemporary period the scholars tried to learn from some of the previous shortcomings in the works of the scholars who did some researches after Durkheim, Weber and Marx. During this period, learning from the mistakes of the immediate past, taking the inspirations from the works of the classical sociologists and rebuilding the subject have been the main concerns. In this context, it seems relevant to mention the names of two important sociologists who have made their significant contributions. Their works have also been accepted and recognized as important ones after the classical period. These two scholars are Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Although the works of these scholars from the U.S.A. have been accepted internationally, but here only some of their important contributions are being discussed.

3.7 Parson's Action Theory

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) was an important sociologist from U.S.A. who had contributed on the theory of social action, discussed about the action frame of reference and social-system and lately on evolution. His contribution on what he calls it AGIL — Paradigm and Pattern-Variable Scheme are also well known. We shall discuss about them briefly. Talcott Parsons had the advantage of reviewing several scholars from classical sociology and some other social scientists as well. He believed that he could present an integrated theoretical point of view where all the formulations of previous social scientists would lead to. His theoretical constructions, later integrated the points of view of psychologists like Sigmund Freud, economists like Alfred Marshal and sociologists like Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber to name a few. He also believed that all the contributions made by various social scientists lead in one direction to arrive at or rather converge at one single notion of what he calls it 'social action'. Parsons also wanted to understand how social and cultural values are internalised into personality system. In his later work *The Social System* (1951), Parsons said that the three essential components of action are 'personality system, 'social system' and 'cultural system', although each one being a part of action, but none being reducible to the other. In yet another work, *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (1953), Talcott Parsons alongwith his colleagues like Robert Bales and Edward Shills has explained about what he calls it the 'AGIL Paradigm'. Accordingly, A refers to Adaptation, G to Goal — Attainment, I to Integration and L to Latency. Thus AGIL — Paradigm developed by Parsons provided him much higher respect as he ascended towards formulation of sociological theories at a much higher level. His another important theoretical formulation has been what he called it, the "Pattern Variable Scheme". It suggests that either an individual or community as an actor has important choices to make against two polar opposite categories. For example, whether an individual or community in general promote ascription or achievement, alternatively universalism or particularism. Talcott Parsons has referred to five sets of such alternative choices. Additionally, within these five sets of choices, some permutations and combinations could also be made out. For example, from the earlier referred choices mentioned here, it could be ascertained whether the choices made are for universalist achievement or alternatively particularistic ascription sort of orientations. A detailed discussion on these issues could be seen in his book *The Social System* (1951). As stated earlier Talcott Parson has also written on medical profession and theories of evolutionism. In general the theories of Parsons are also seen as his contribution to developing the theories of functionalism. But regarding the theories developed by him, several scholars from the Western societies as well as from elsewhere have expressed the opinion that his formulations are difficult to understand and there is a need to present it all in the simpler form. There is another criticism which is associated with his work. It has been stated by several scholars that the works of Talcott Parsons are too much theoretical in nature, sometime they appear as 'grand theories' and generally have very little to do with the existing life of today or with the empirical reality. Agreeing with all such criticisms that it is true that Parsons theoretical formulations might appear difficult to comprehend, might not refer to the empirical material but nonetheless, they could be considered as important contributions. In the views of the preset author, such theoretical formulations are required in sociology and the learners of sociology must attempt to comprehend such rigorous material. Talcott Parsons himself clarified that his works had remained concerned with the tasks of providing theoretical schemes only. According

to him then it remained the task of some other scholars/sociologists to verify and test his theories. But in order for sociology to grow as a subject, it was necessary to strike a balance between theoretical formulations and factual informations. Another sociologist namely Robert K. Merton has tried to move exactly in that direction. His contributions to sociological theory are discussed in what follows.

Box 3.3: Mertons Contributions

Robert K. Merton (1910-), another prominent sociologist from the U.S.A. has tried to strike a reasonable balance between theory and fact. He was somehow convinced that neither theory nor facts alone would suffice to move in the desired direction. Basically, he argued to develop research methodology in such a way as it not only included a meaningful balance between theory and fact but also attempted to improve the quality of both. For example, on the one hand Merton never accepted the formulations of his predecessor sociologists as such and on numerous occasions he has tried to make corrections in the writings of various scholars including Radcliffe – Brown and Malinowski. Robert K. Merton, who attempted to rebuild and reformulate "functional theory" has identified several mistakes committed unknowingly by earlier scholars and later he attempted to reconstruct functional theory.

Robert K. Merton firmly believed that the whole of functional theory could not be abandoned or discarded because some of the mistakes were committed by some of the contributors to it at the earlier stages. His approach was to learn from the mistakes, identify them, try to remove them and make functional theory as a viable approach for research investigations in sociology. Regarding social research he explained it as an interplay between theory and facts. Merton's views on social research could be found in his book, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968). his views on the functional theory could also be seen in the same book. While reconstructing functional theory, Merton has referred to three postulates one, the postulate of functional unity of society; two, the postulate of universal functionalism and three, the postulate of indispensability. He later suggested that such postulates which once upon a time guided the works of some earlier sociologists were no longer necessary. Additionally, Merton has explained about what he calls it, "Middle Range Theories" and its necessities in the contemporary period. Merton has also clarified in detail about what he calls it "Reference Group Theory". In this way we could see that in his own way, Robert K. Merton tried to build-up the much required ground and created the environment for the development of sociology as a scientific discipline. From the above discussion it is now clear that both Talcott Parsons as well as Robert K. Merton made great efforts to carry forward the discipline of sociology and in this endeavor they were quite successful too.

3.8   Recent Advances in Sociological Theories

Recent advances that were made in sociology are quite important and meaningful. Besides the works of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, A.R. Radcliffe – Brown, Branislaw Malinowski, Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton which were mainly influenced by and to a large extent remained concerned with the philosophy of positivism, there was another stream of thought emerging out during the same period. The development of sociology has witnessed, apart from the philosophical background of positivism another stream of thought initiated and encouraged by the German sociologists like Max Weber.

Reflection and Action 3.2

Provide an outline of recent advances in sociological theories. Write down your answer in your notebook.

It was Max Weber who defined sociology as an interpretative understanding of social action. Max Weber initiated the debate on why the elements of subjectivity, subjective understaning and Verstahen should be included in sociology. Max Weber, never impressed by the formulations centered around positivism wanted to give a new direction to the formulations in sociological theory. In fact the whole debate centered around the issues of subjectivity versus objectivity was initiated and inspired by Max Weber. In fact, sociology as a subject has been strengthen by the efforts made by Max Weber. Here a reference to only two such new areas of research namely phenomenology and ethnomethodology shall be made. These two topics represent the main areas concerned with the recent advances made in sociological research. Two other topics require a mention here as they have emerged in the recent times, they are postmodernism and globalisation. We hope that at various stages of learning sociology all such concepts shall be discussed. Although sociological theories initially developed to strengthen the subject and establish it as a core discipline in itself, but with the advancement of the subject certain perspectives clearly emerged in the process. Here a reference shall be made to only such perspectives which have had a direct bearing upon the development of sociology. Sometimes the terms like theories and perspectives have been used interchangeably also. Some of the popular perspectives developed in sociology are known as functional perspective, conflict perspective, exchange perspective and symbolic interactionist perspective. Although several scholars in one or another way have been associated different perspectives but here only those thinkers shall be mentioned whose names are generally familiar to us. The names of Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton have been associated with the functional perspective, Karl Marx represents the conflict perspective, B. Malinowski discussed the material related to the exchange perspective whereas Herbert Blumer discussed about symbolic interactionist perspective. Here it might be advised that while discussing about sociological theories it would be relevant to keep in mind the role of thinkers, as well as that of various perspectives to which they were associated.

3.9   The Concept of Paradigm

It was Kuhn, who first suggested that development within a discipline, especially science is not a gradual process but in fact takes place quite suddenly. Hence, Kuhn's books entitled the structure of scientific revolution. Kuhn calls these sudden charges as "paradigm shifts".

According to Kuhn, science and by extension social science undergoes its process in three phases which are discernible.

i)   Prescientific phase

ii)   Normal science

iii)   Paradigm shift

In the initial phase theories of explanation are incomplete and completing with one another. At some point one of the theories establishes itself bringing in the phase of normal science. In this phase a single theory or a set of theories emerge dominant which Kuhn calls a paradigm.

When there is a paradigm shift the situation is one where the previous theories have proved to be redundant. For Kuhn this a natural process and it repeats itself over time as the new and established theories themselves become incomplete as knowledge expands. At this point the solution lies in modifying the theories or to abandon them for another set of dominant or competing theoretical explanations which offer more complete and better explanation for both science, social science and world-view as whole.

We can give an example of paradigm shift by referring to Copernicus who pointed out that it was the earth that revolved around the earth rather than the sun revolving around the earth as was Ptolemy's position. Copernicus gained adherence to his views with scientific data to prove them. A sudden shift in terms of theories concepts and perspectives emerged with great speed and there was a paradigm shift. A new theoretical explanation emerges and establishes itself ushering in the new set of theories and perspectives. Another example of paradigm shift occurred when Einstein's theory of relativity replaced Newton's theory of gravity.

We must point that according to Kuhn the paradigm shift implies a rather drastic if not total replacement of the previously established theories of science and social science. In short the earlier theories are non comparable. The shift is total. The way language is used, the development of new concepts, words and meanings is part of a paradigm shift so are norms, values and mores.

To put it differently a paradigm shift implies a new view of the world, its perception, perspective, and overall attitudes of the world community charges and charges with great speed. In the era, of globalisation which witness the postmodern paradigm shift in which the local context is considered to be the focus of study and the consideration of general or mega theories is not considered either wise or practical.

Thus the concept of paradigm has two aspects to it. The first is that which engulfs the whole and subsumes its various parts on subsets. It comprises all the procedure of science or social science. This is a global paradigm. At the second level me find there are theories and practices which bolster the existing paradigm of the society/globe.

We must clarify it here that although some efforts have been put in to make sociology a distinct, independent and a scientific discipline, by some great scholars included, but the sociological theories thus produced have also been challenged on several grounds. This once again highlights the scientific nature of sociology where every theory can be put to test and liable to be rejected if found wrong. Thus, in sociological theories, as in other sciences as well, there is nothing like an eternal a universal truth that remains a truth under all the conditions and at every moment of time. Sociological theories should also not to be confused with something like religious or meta-physical assertions. Nor sociological theories are comparable to philosophical guidelines to be followed. Sociological theories have come out of such problems and the challenges faced by them today are of another nature and most of them are of scientific type. And in order to achieve that scientific nature, sociology has travelled a longer path since the writings of Auguste Comte who had established it as a positivist science. The first challenge to sociological theories has come from the huge amount of data that have been generated throughout the world, especially after the World War II. For example, data

generated in the area of demography has led to several new innovations at the theoretical level. Similarly data concerning Human Development Index has helped in making transnational comparisons. The second challenge to sociological theory has come from the processes of change that are taking shape at various levels of society. To put it in simple words it could be said that the processes of social change keep on going in society, independently of the fact whether sociologists study them or not. In fact in the contemporary world the processes social change are not only complex in nature but they are taking shape at a much faster pace today. As a result of it, many a times sociologists are not actually in a position to study them all. There are several such phenomenon which require some serious sociological studies like for example, the consequences of AIDS and that of terrorism. Much remains to be done in these areas. The third challenge to sociological theories came when society at large had undergone some significant periods of time. These important periods include the end of the World War II, end of the colonial rule at various places in the world and the emergence of various independent nation – states. The sociological theories have had to accommodate itself several times when such important changes were taking shape in the world. The fourth challenge to sociological theory has come due to some misconceptions about sociology as a subject that is basically meant to solve the current problems of society. In fact sociology is quite capable of solving the problems of society too, but so far it has kept itself limited upto their scientific study only. But at the level of response to some of these problems and challenges faced, sociologists have attempted to address some of them. As a consequence of the efforts of the sociologists we have seen the emergence of certain theoretical formulations centered around the conceptions like rationality, postmodernism, globalisation and civil society. At the level of sociological theory, intellectuals and academicians from the subject have also responded meaningfully on the topics like democracy, socialism and secularism. Sociologists to some extent through their writings have made their presence felt in the area of the reconstruction of society.

3.10 Conclusion

We have seen what comprises a theory and what a paradigm means. We have taken an analysis of classical sociological theories, and seen how Comte enunciated the law of the three stages, Marxian ideology, Weberian ideology, Parson's action theory and some recent advances in sociological theory. Finally we turned to the concept of paradigm and explained what it means in terms of the intellectually violent stuff's in the dominance of theories, which have been termed paradigm shifts by Thomas Kuhn. We have adequately indicated the subject to which we addressed ourselves to.

3.11 Further Reading

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Unit 4
Social Construction of Reality

Contents

Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit you should be able to

- define "reality" and "social construction"

- describe construction of reality

- indicate the relation between language legitimation socialisation and reality

- describe social reality and the symbolic universe.

4.1   Introduction

In this lesson we are going to try and understand what exactly is meant by the "social construction" of "reality". What do we mean by these words? Unless we understand each of these interrelated concepts it would be difficult to proceed with our presentation of this most important aspect of social reality. Social reality indicates quite clearly that what we are referring to is in fact basically the capacity of society to develop different ways of looking at the constituents of the visible aspects of reality. Thus in fact as we will see that there are many societies and many cultures, but what is common among them is that social reality tries to perpetuate itself through the younger generation, but this does not usually succeed and the social reality of each generation has several points of departure from the preceding generation.

What is being said is that members of any society live by certain beliefs and principles but these were not always there and there have been significant shifts in each generations point of view and perspectives. The points of importance in discussing the social construction of reality is that in most societies the version of reality is not a single monolithic construct but rather consists of several layers of meaning and existence. That is to say that there are many social constructions of reality which differ from category to category. So we must point out that while the method of social construction of reality remains similar in most societies it is also very clear that there are "multiple synchronic realities", that is many versions of culture and reality

are available especially in plural societies where these realities then intermesh and interact and influence each other in various ways. Thus it is clear that "reality" is constructed in a specific way but this does not mean that all versions of reality are the same. There is often much difference in their expression. Society which creates reality, as we will see, provides many different points of ingress and is responsible for creating a socially intermeshed reality. What we are saying then is that there are plural indeed multiple reality systems available for us to observe in our daily life which is really the very root of any social constructions and sustains the same even through periods of lawlessness and disruptions.

Once we have read and understood the points made above it should be clear that what we are discussing concerns the secure and integrated way in which society perpetuates its attitudes and beliefs. It is also clear that each generation brings with a whole lot of perceptual expectations and a minimum acceptable standard of living so that it can lead a meaningful existence. So it has to be noted that society as a whole contains and keeps in balance that entire social process from cradle to the tomb.

4.2 Construction of Reality

Now it would be natural to ask how is all this construction of multiple and synchronic realities are achieved. What are the ways and the mechanism in which we as members together create a perception of the world process. Surprisingly social realities are created as soon as the new members of society are ready a particular imprinting is begun to be ingrained in them. Among the important areas of life include the economic, political, psychological, and so on and each of them is put together by training the new generation to act and behave in some particular manner which they deem to be fit and worthy of them.

The social fabric of any society is a fragile construct which has to be constantly renewed through ritual and sustained interactions. Thus reality itself is "fragile"so that any disturbing or conflictual situations lead to a breakdown of order and mayhem rules. After such social breakdowns which occur in interaction, in times of war with another nation or even chronic lawlessness. It takes much time to recover from such breakdowns of reality and the time they take to repair the social fabric may last many years or even make a lifetime impact on some of the members. Thus as we introduce the lesson we have to point out that culture is many faceted and the construction of reality though similar in many societies does in fact differ from individual to individual and from nation to nation. There is doubt that in the mind of the young and impressionable that has to develop certain capacity to be bounded say by religious or economic status. Thus there is different life style created by the different castes and classes which have a full blown ideology and interaction in everyday life. These are not mere ways of looking at things out of curiosity. Rather it is a critical situation where the constructed reality has to be continuously fed and bolstered so to speak into the social system or systems.

As such when we discuss how social reality is constructed then it becomes very clear to us that in order to perpetuate itself society takes recourse to both socialisation and education and continues to control the individual to some extent and even bring within him a sense of responsibility to further perpetuate his reality.

We are going to explain in this lesson how social process constructs reality and thereby goes further to establish that very pattern of culture and ideology which they themselves were taught and learnt to make the appropriate judgments and decisions within that very frame work. Thus in such a delicate and precise operation it becomes obvious that not all members would be able to fit in fully into the social fabric, and these are deviant individuals and society attempts through various other therapies to bring the deviant back into the centre or the "mainstream" of society.

We have pointed out in various ways that our reality and experience are all constructed by human beings in communities, large groups, nation states, and at times by much larger concerns than the nation state itself. The task of the sociology of knowledge is to indicate how precisely these constructions of social reality are evolved by human beings and groups and community of human beings. Thus the interrelationship between knowledge and the social context in which it has evolved is an important ingredient in understanding how society is able to create and recreate itself over the ages.

According to some social scientists it is believed that the societal context was the basis of the existence of ideas but not the precise ideas themselves, and therefore gave the individual some critical degree of voluntary actions and freedom of action. On the other hand there are other social scientists who believe that human thought per se is never safe from ideology and the intellectual climate prevailing in the environment as a whole. It is thus clear that, as the social scientists have pointed out that the acquisition of knowledge is accretional and it gathers relatively slowly, and only when sufficient aspects of the knowledge sought are examined does the view of any reality become focused and clear. Thus knowledge is accumulated over time and it is not possible for it to be given full blown to the new members, and existing members are continually given fresh inputs through media, institutions, family and work environment and so on to keep them abreast of the events that are happening in society as a whole.

4.3   Phenomena of Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann feel that to study the phenomena of social reality implies that we use everyday common sense reality as a point of departure. This is what knowledge ultimately comprises: the interaction and participation in social life and process. Thus "commonsense ideas" are the most important ingress into understanding the sociology and phenomena of individuals, groups and society. Thus it is clear that society has at the very least two sides to its existence and ontology- one is subjective and the other is objective. Together these facts give rise to the understanding that while there is a group life for an individual there is in fact an objective reality , rules and regulations which have to be adhered to, unless the individual or group wants to be ostracized. Thus first of all the reality of social life is sui generic that exists over above and beyond any single individual. Thus Berger is interested, as are we, in finding out how humans produce and perpetuate social life in all its manifold facets and aspects. Thus by attempting to understand social reality we are really asking how it was constructed, because this is what will give us the cues to proceed further with our line of enquiry.

4.4   Everyday Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann point out that everyday life and its basis is such that it is best apprehended by the method of phenomenological analysis, which

happens to be a descriptive method. Thus we observe that consciousness has the basic property of existing in several dimensions and several types of reality. Thus human beings are aware to a greater or lesser extent that the social world comprises of many or "multiple realities" in everyday life. These multiple realities are themselves well ordered and more or less fully developed and quite capable of influencing each other. Thus phenomena are, such that a particular pattern can be discerned by human beings, and these social facts are imposed upon them. In other words a new entrant into a society sooner or later finds that he or she has a particular social order which is imposed upon him or her. Thus we find that common sense knowledge is what human beings share intersubjectively through interaction with other human beings. This becomes very clear in the structure of routine that human beings follow in the course of their daily life. Pursuing an enquiry into common sense knowledge and its social context is relatively simple, but Berger and Luckmann point out that the difficulty exists in the comprehension and "translation" of those areas which are not classifiable as common sense knowledge but are in fact non everyday reality.

Box 4.1: Indexical Constructions

The entire social world….. is a set of indexicalities, which are taken for granted. They are rarely called into question, and when they are, the questioning stays at a superficial level, accepting fairly quick and easy classifications instead of pursuing the search for objectivity to its end. For there is no end: the search for objectivity definable reality is a bottomless pit. (Randall Collins 1988, *Theoretical Sociology*. Onlando : Harcourt Brace p: 277).

To understand the social construction of reality we have to be aware of the time-structure of daily life since this sheds an important insight on the overall social order. As Berger and Luckmann point out that temporality reflects and is a basic property of consciousness itself. Again we find that the temporal structure of daily life is an extremely complicated matter. This is because consciousness exists and interacts at many different level and all these different levels of reality have to be seen as interrelated and arranged in a specific pattern. Thus the temporal structure existing in society indicates clearly defines the situation for members of the particular society they belong to.

Let us consider the question of daily interactions between human beings in any particular society. In these interactions it is the direct or face to face situations which define much of the structure of reality in everyday life. This is because when there is face to face interaction the self and the other an inter subjective understanding by each of the other. Self reflection is also an outcome of the behaviour with others, as it makes us conscious of what we are and stand for in society, since it creates or even "gives" us our attitudes and subsequently our behaviour, which in turn is the basis of human social reality, or "realities".

It may be pointed out however that everyday reality itself has many components and these itself could generate specific situations and attitudes. It is therefore clear on observation that while there are basic similarities in social reality there are also areas that create rules of their own and impose them on the members of a given reality. This reality again although it is so

clearly present in social situations is in fact influenced and bounded by the rules of social reality.

4.5 Language and Social Reality

Another area where social reality is present is that of the area of language. All languages have a particular grammar and syntax, and is the most significant and important sign system of all societies. It helps to create a fund of knowledge which is continuously going expansion and contraction as different words and ideas which enter into the overall fund of knowledge and ideas. And there are some aspects of knowledge and understanding which 'fall out' of the overall system of ideas and knowledge. Thus for example the English language has compiled vast dictionaries which are revised, edited and updated, and in these social procedures many new words and concepts enter into the language. There are also words and ideas that become defunct and are removed from the dictionary and language.

So we can say that language as a social reality accumulates knowledge and transmits it to other members of the human system, which in turn create a socially ordered environment.

It may be pointed out here that language itself is a highly complex aspect of social reality and research into how a human being leans and adapts to the social order or reality. Thus it is pointed out that language is symbolic and therefore capable of apprehending social reality. Therefore, it is a social fact which exercises control or restraint over human members, and yet remains an externalisation, and outside the individual. This is because the ontological reality of language is such that it is the backbone of social order and its main artery of communication.

> **Reflection and Action 4.1**
>
> Is society socially constructed or is it a divine religiously raised structure? Reflect and comment.

We can therefore say that language is a vast repertory of knowledge, reason, morality, politics and social attitudes. It can then be added that if the language is changed the particular ideological leaning of a linguistic framework would also be deeply affected. Thus social reality can be apprehended by a study of language and its application to varying situations within the societal context. Related to this is the idea that not only does language provide us an ingress into the overall structure of society, it is basic to human progress and the shift in the prominent features of social reality form a basic component on the history of theories and ideas so far as sociology and the sociology of knowledge is concerned.

4.6 The Objective Reality of Society

Let us now consider the objective reality of society. By objective reality we mean that society exercises control over the individual, and is beyond the control of any single individual. Let us see how this happens in society with the specific focus on institutions. How does an institution direct and control the behaviour of its members, and how is it that while individuals are born live and die, institutions can exist indefinitely in time. This is why we are choosing this area for the exemplification of the social reality which exists and how it continues to exist.

Let us look at the phenomena of institutionalisation, a procedure that creates a space and certain goals and aims that would be reached through various rules that define institutional behaviour. It has been pointed out that every institution exists in both a physical environment and a social environment. The fact is that both these are "given" and cannot be altered at will. In fact it is his overall social and physical environment that makes man a human being. It is this interaction with the physical and social environment that creates the existence of all human activity. This is because no human activity can be begun or completed without the due impact of the overall or "total" environment.

Now the question arises regarding how institutions themselves begin continue and establish themselves. In short we are now asking the origin of human institutions. It may be pointed out that institutions arise when there is the "reciprocal typifications" of the habitualized behaviour that make for strictly patterned behaviour which should not go out of the limits of the overall control pattern. Thus the various different tasks that members carry on lead to an institution taking over social control of its members. When this has happened we may say that the institutions has "arrived" or has become crystallized. Thus institutions which were initially humanly created over time soon develop a socially objective reality of their **own**.

Box 4.2: Experience and Interpretation

...We cannot claim that this embedded ness is absolutely universal... the world is not always taken as ordinary by all people and all occasions. Buddhist mediators and other mystics have devised deliberate methods for withdrawing the mind's assent to ordinary assumptions about reality and have claimed to experience an illumination by looking at whatever transpires without putting any interpretation upon it. (Randall Collins 1988, *Theoretical Sociology*, p:279 Orlando : Harcourt Brace).

Berger and Luckmann point out that the relation between man and his social world is dialectical, that is each phenomena acts, interacts and reacts to the other. Thus man and nature cannot be separated as each has an effect on the other which can be beneficial or detrimental. Thus we can say that social reality has three interrelated aspects. These are the facts that society is produced by human beings; further it becomes clear that society is an objective reality; and that as a consequence of these factors man becomes a social product himself.

Now society requires to be accepted or realised, that is to say it is in need of legitimation, which is done by socialising the new generation of members into the preexisting patterned ways of interaction. Socialisation it may be pointed out is done steadily and almost continuously during the growing years, and it never ends even unto death and attitudes towards the beyond. That is to say institutions provide for rules of birth, life and death and how these processes can be made more efficient. However socialization is never wholly able to keep all members in the line of control and as such there are some percentage of deviants in any society.

The inner control or the control of attitudes is what makes the institution such a powerful force. However social reality, shared experiences, and common compliance lead to an inner and outer congealing of experience

which settles down in the subconscious and exercises control and this is what makes socialisation firm , steady and perpetual. It is through institutions like the family that we learn to become human beings and to exhibit behaviours that are socially beneficial. However again there is no perfect correlation between legitimation socialisation and overall behaviour. And there are "lapses" in socialisation which can sometimes lead to a tear in the social fabric in the form of riots or other violent disturbances just because the social control of institutions and how it is passed on sometimes break down, and such a situation could be dangerous for social harmony.

Apart from the above we find that human beings have to enact a particular learned role behaviour which is essential to the wellbeing of the fabric of society. Roles set up mutual obligations and reciprocal links. When these roles are repeated often enough an elaborate role structure develops. This is so even if a role play is relatively simple, and much more so as the role has wider implications and much greater social control.

Thus a role defines the social self and the other way round. Roles have their origin in reciprocal typifications, just as do institutions. Roles create a social fabric that is linked both in time and space, and has further to conform to the role limits and thereby forming the very backbone of institutions and social life as a whole.

This is to say it is institutions that shape the individuals and then start depending upon them. Therefore to play a role properly the player or member must know the wholeness of the role, and realise it in its many intricacies, including the cognitive and the behavioral aspect. This implies that there is a social distribution of knowledge in society which occurs as the members play and enact their social roles, leading to a basic understanding of how a member is supposed to respond to some other social person in interaction or reflection. It has been pointed out that the study of roles is very important in the sociology of knowledge since that is what leads us to learn about how the macroscopic institutions impact upon the individual and the group and create "real" experiences which are part of the construction of social reality. Thus as we go along we find that construction of social reality is in fact an elaborate cooperative effort of all the members of society, and is not something that any one individual can undertake.

If a society is relatively coherent and orderly it will have institutions that are respected and shared by members of a society. On the other hand if there is much conflict and disorder in society it is clear that the institutions within society are breaking up or at least not being subscribed to in any great measure. In other words if there is a society that is highly balkanized its institutional base will also have multiple synchronous societies, or subcultures. In fact it is the existence of subcultures which indicate quite clearly that we cannot talk about "reality" in the singular and it must be realised that "reality" is not the same throughout a society or a nation state.   In fact there are plural perceptions of society depending on the precise position that a member is located within his or her community. This is because knowledge is the product of interaction between its knowledge base and the social context. However we need to point out here that there are such institutions which become so powerful, that they indeed become "reified" and take on an almost independent course sometimes disturbing the given arrangements in society in anomic situations where social order breaks down temporarily.

4.7 Legitimation and Social Reality

Let us now turn to another aspect of the social construction of reality, and this is the process of "legitimation" which provides an institution within society its overall rationale and rules of conduct. It provides the society with a set of rules and regulations which are taken to be the actual or true meaning of the purpose or ideology of an institution. By being legitimated the institutions in society are able to provide guidelines of the work conditions that members of each institution are supposed to follow or face sanctions which could range from the nominal to the extreme forms of the same existing rules that apprehend conduct that is not in the interests of the organisation.

Reflection and Action 4.2

Why does social institution need legitimation? Reflect and comment.

Thus legitimation provides a total rationale regarding what the actor or actors are supposed to do, could do and even want to do. In short we cannot say that institutionalisation is relatively successful unless all actions are legitimated by the ideology of the institution which is normally an extension of the overall national or globe society. However we need to keep in mind that the theoretical-ideological axis **that** upholds most institutions is often a fragile one and the indifferent or different behaviour within an institutional context can make it breakdown and cease to exist effectively. At this point we must indicate that another dimension of legitimation concerns the symbolic universe. These symbolic universes take the social construction of reality to another level, which help to make society cohere. The symbolic universe is a matrix of total meaning both objective and subjective and it is actually the apprehension of the symbolic universe is necessary to be able to be a member of society and thereby living within the prescribed social order and be a member of any specific society. Thus it is the symbolic universe which is a cognitive tool to apprehend, be a member of, or even to subvert the process of social construction which as we pointed out earlier suffers from being in a fragile condition and therefore has to be bolstered by various institutional modalities to give it continuity and to go on from generation to generation, all the while adapting and reordering itself to meet the challenged of a new generation, which has grown up with different values. As such no matter how legitimate an institution within society is, it definitely undergoes changes and new legitimation links have to be brought in to explain new , even threatening situations. As such the process of legitimation may be spread out over time ns that may prove to be much greater than even the total life of any of its members. Thus it is the symbolic universe which is of prime importance in the overall "hierarchy" of a human being can experience.

Box 4.3: Mind and Society

The symbolic universe is what arranges a society in the mind of the members so that what is perceived through the senses, in fact all possible experience is filtered down through the cognitive process both objective and subjective. It is thus the binding glue of society and we have briefly indicated that it takes control of all the discrete bits of knowledge and social procedure and is able to combine and resolve it within the given frame work of societal membership. As Berger and Luckmann put it that "it makes sense of the entire universe". By this we mean the social and cultural states of being

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that exist in any culture have to be apprehended as cognitive aspects of gaining membership. This is so because each group of members who share similar situations will be coerced into trying a finding meaning in the world of everyday life, because it is in part a projection of the desires, fears and expectations of other members within an institution or institutions in society.

Thus it becomes clear that the symbolic universe is a method for not only apprehending reality but creating it also, and thus what we are talking about is the fact that there is an intermesh between the subjective and the objective side of reality, both of which are perceived by human beings who are members of any institution or group of institutions in any society.

Thus it is pointed out that "placement" within a symbolic order or symbolic universe is really very important and the very basis of the perception that will be available to any member in society. Thus we can clearly see how members of any society are keenly engaged in the task of socially constructing a reality that is able to cope with all unforeseen situations. However such total control is very difficult and in every society we find that there are problems which cry for a solution. Further it is also absolutely clear since Durkheim that any socially constructed system "leaks", that is there are always some people or groups of people which see reality in a way different from the majority of the members. This is what often causes "tears" in the social fabric of society with no matter how much care the members have helped to construct or build it up. In short human beings have not only to be apprehending legitimate structures but maintaining their continuity. Indeed there are some groups or institutions like family, polity, commerce and so on which also find similarities among them but they are also quite different in their scope and spread in any group no matter how large or small it is.

4.8 Socialisation and Legitimation

Let us now turn to how the human mind uses various concepts to uphold the symbolic universe that is related to and is a part of societal processes. Thus if an institution is to be a part of the members existence it has to be appropriately legitimated, by being located or placed in some particular part of the symbolic universe. This is what gives it meaning and power to social reality. If the symbolic universe undergoes a shift over time then new legitimating structures and discourses are invented by the human mind, to bolster the social reality that has been disturbed or "shaken", and make it whole again. This happens in times of great stress political, economic or social, but the symbolic universe remains even though in a somewhat attenuated form.

Now further if the symbolic universe is confronted with a pattern of socialisation that is paradoxical or even contradictory to it then a problem of lack of meaning arises and has to be dealt with the establishment of a new ideological framework or concepts that can deal with the altered reality. When this happens the societal forces and institutions begin to repress the groups who are perceived as threatening for the symbolic universe, in an attempt to retrieve all that can be kept from the old symbolic order into the new, and thereby salvage something from the past or the social order which has readjusted itself to deal with the new situations in social processes.

Thus we find that the construction of social reality is also dependent on the precision of the concepts that are there to deal with it. If these concepts are traditional they will usually require a new or modern interpretation. On the other hand the concepts and attitudes that are retained will now be placed differently in the new ideology that has been both created and accepted by members of a society. Thus this process requires cognitive and normative bolstering or legitimation.

We may say then that mythology itself provides the conceptual apparatus for the symbolic universe, and this functions as a adaptive mechanism so far as the society is concerned. It has been pointed out that mythology itself was created to overcome paradoxes and inconsistencies in the overall environment. Berger and Luckman point out to maintain the symbolic universe there are several types of conceptual equipment including:

1) Mythology

2) Theology

3) Philosophy and

4) Science

Now while mythology is associated with the mass construction of social reality we find that the other three elements mentioned become increasingly the domain of the specialists and the elites. Such a body of knowledge is quite different than what the specialists in theology, philosophy and science are concerned with. That is to say that the relation between the lay person and the expert becomes very different from each other as the latter are a specialised activity of the social elites

We may ask at this point that what are the implications and applications of the creation and maintenance of the symbolic universe. There are in fact two features of the symbolic universe maintenance. These are:

1) Therapy and

2) Inhalation.

In the case of the therapeutics of symbolic universe maintenance what happens is that the attempt of the concepts that form the symbolic universe are used to re-socialise members so that they can play their role in society. Yet it may be noted that therapy itself does not claim or reclaim all the members. In such a case the symbolic universe and its implications have not been properly understood, if they have been understood at all.

In the case of the concept of inhalation we find that all areas of meaning and existence that are not subsumed under the symbolic universe have to be erased or eliminated so that they do not start challenging the legitimacy of the same.

Thus in both these approaches or applications we find that the aim of the exercise is to ensure integration and incorporation into society. If this is not done the society will undergo anomic disturbances, and the social order will become dysfunctional. Thus a truly representative symbolic universe is one that covers conceptually each and every aspect of reality and leaves nothing out whatsoever. It is obvious that such a system does not exist and in practice each member is basically approximating the concepts of the symbolic universe. In doing this the members of a society come to have many ideas in common but there is still room for individuation of the members.

4.9 Social Reality and The Symbolic Universe

Now what is the implication for social organisation and the maintenance of the symbolic universe? We have already made the point that reality is socially defined, and that it is human beings and human groups that define its contours. Thus we find that the specialists in a society provide complete legitimation of the social reality. Such experts usually hold very different views from lay members on definitions of reality. Thus we may point out again that there can be differences of view and opinion between the experts and the laymen. There is thus a sort of competition on whose definitions and concepts are going to be beneficial and become operative in social interaction.

As we can see there are different ways of apprehending and perceiving social process. Which way is seen as the best course of action depends on the ideology which is invoked and which concepts are used to explain any aspect of the symbolic universe that has become the area of concern, eg. societal conflict over the distribution of resources. Groups often subscribe to an ideology which will benefit them and invoke theories which will help them achieve their goals, social, economic or political.

Box 4.4: Pluralism and Reality

It may be noted that most modern societies are pluralistic comprising many races ethnicities and religions. In such pluralistic societies the room for conflict is much reduced and outright conflict is rare. Pluralism itself arises in times of rapid change and erodes the strong foundations of traditions and make them form new structures and patterns of interaction, and new theories are invented to legitimate the new social structures in society.

Such legitimations are necessary as we have pointed out, because without them no new ideology can be formed or if formed it cannot be successful in maintaining and propagating it. On the other hand we find institutions themselves are changed or altered in some way to fit into the existing social reality, and there is thus a dialectic between institutions and social reality. Again the definition of reality itself projects that reality and these definitions often have a self fulfilling aspect to them and begin to change the contours of reality itself in social process. Thus social change can only be understood as a dialectical process between the new theories that legitimate new institutions.

These institutions are also affected and themselves change to have a closer correlation between themselves and the theories and ideologies used to legitimate them. It may be added here that the social construction of reality is a human product and has been realised by the efforts of human beings alone and is experienced by them as a set of complete experiences. The sociology of knowledge maintains that the existence of the symbolic universe is reflected in the lives of the members of the society. As a corollary to this we may add that the existence of a symbolic universe has its base in individuals and has no existence apart from their lives. In short although we are saying that man produces the reality within which he then lives, procreates and expires, he is not quite capable of altering it alone and requires a group or community to do the same.

Let us now turn to the description of society in relation to subjective reality. We shall first dwell on primary and secondary socialisation as ways

in which human beings create their own reality. Thus society exists both as objective and subjective reality. To understand this fully we need to appreciate that society is an ongoing process which comprises the elements of:

1) Externalisation

2) Objectification and,

3) Internalisation

As the human externalises social reality it acts back upon him and he internalises it. This means that the existing social situation has been apprehended and subscribed to in such great measure that certain actions and interactions become most mechanical and their existence is never called into question. Thus there is a time sequence involved in the imparting of certain basic and essential points of social reference, which means it takes time to become a fully fledged member of any society. Being a fully fledged member of a society means that the member has acquired membership, and is able to make decisions, interpretations and even plan and pursue an objective or a goal over time. Thus as Berger and Luckmann put it that the individual becomes a member "through a temporal sequence" and as the social reality is apprehended more and more the members of a society are able to predict the outcome of certain actions and interactions. This is to say as social reality is apprehended more and more the human being is able to be an aware member of society, being able to realize and live up to his expectations within limits set by society itself.

It may thus be pointed out that primary socialisation comprises the understanding of roles of the personal others and the generalised other. In short such socialisation proceeds from the inner circle or close circle of a human being to wider and wider circles until it encompasses the whole of society. Now this does not happen in a majority of cases and primary socialisation in some cases does fail to bring about the desired uniformity within the society. This type of deviance within the society however is not a matter of alarm but of serious concern. Thus when the gestalt of the generalised other has been learnt we find that both the objective and the subjective sides of social reality balance and successful primary socialisation has been completed.

Secondary socialisation in fact is a necessary aspect of the division of labour, and how knowledge has been distributed within the society. At this point we find that the institutional sub worlds have been internalised and role specific knowledge has been generated, concerning the social activity and output that any role required. Thus secondary socialization adds new layers of data and knowledge which in some cases even supercede some aspects of primary socialisation. However to establish overall consistency we find that secondary socialisation presumes conceptual clarity to bring together different bodies of knowledge under a single umbrella. We may point out here that while in primary socialisation of the members or group that is acting upon a human being is relatively small.

In the case of secondary socialisation the people who act and influence ones mentality and behaviour are very many numerically speaking. One has entered the ocean from the pond and in secondary socialisation one is in the midst of society at large. There is inevitably a formality and lack of personal depth in the secondary socialisation, which is there because of the complex division of labour, which in itself demands that the institutional reality is not disturbed

too much and there are institutions like marriage which have been there in human society since time immemorial and continue to be with us.

As can be readily seen both primary and secondary socialization are delicate procedures and have to be carefully imparted and acquired. Thus socialisation is a process that occurs as part of every human society, but to maintain the objective and subjective structures does not always happen. There is a certain level of deviancy in every community. To contain this deviancy society has to develop some control procedures to protect its disruption and eventual disintegration. Thus reality maintenance procedures such as mass media or mass contact programmes become part of the overall attempt to perpetuate social reality and to make the human perception of it be integrated and coherent.

In this regard it can be pointed out that usually it is primary socialisation which has a greater durability and is much more strongly ingrained than the procedures of secondary socialisation whose layers of gloss of meaning often do not stand up to scrutiny and start breaking apart. Well established rules of conduct may be challenged and a new set of rules may take their place or at least effect some part of their existence. Thus secondary socialisation is more "artificial" by nature, and is less deeply lodged in the human than the primary socialisation. As we shall now discuss it is casual conversation which is what is responsible for the continuation of both the objective and the subjective states of reality.

Thus we now turn to a description of the role language plays in reality maintenance.

4.10 Maintaining Reality and Language

It may be pointed out here that the language that a society uses is a strong foundation and process for the maintenance and perpetuation of socially constructed reality. In language society finds an institution so to speak, and maintains social reality through its incessant use both in formal and informal settings. In fact there are prominent theories which indicate that language itself may be at the base of reality and helps greatly in constructing it. It needs to be indicated just as language is a social fact then the reality and conceptualisation of social reality is an aspect of ongoing social reality.

Box 4.5: Paradigms of Social Reality

Language needs to be modified over time and this itself indicates that social reality is malleable to a certain state and undergoes changes especially in the dominant ideology, as a whole of the society under consideration. This in itself implies that over a process of time new paradigms of social reality emerge and posit their own challenges to the members of society. Such new paradigms of social reality however take time to settle down into the consciousness of the members, and we can have two or more paradigms working at the same time in a society. Thus as we pointed out earlier there is in fact a multiple social reality, rather than one single overarching model of society. It is then obvious that such a complicated and delicate man oeuvre as constructing reality is an ongoing process and can be subverted only to an extent by rival groups in the society or community who give different versions and different choices to the members. In terms of life options and work options so that the relationship is dialectical.

Thus if language structures and usage help construct realty, it is also clear that life experience and life situations also feedback into language structures effectively modifying them and influencing their overall content. It needs to be kept in mind that language is indispensable in creating compatible consensual social constructions, and that it is what connects people. We need to mention here briefly that when we consider language and we are entering into the realm of a vast system of symbols , gestures, hints, clues and even moral prescriptions, and the fields of semiotics and kinesthetics, all of which are an aspect of societal process., and are central to human communication. Thus the role of language in the construction of reality cannot be undermined or minimised. In fact without effective communication, sharing of information, ideas and knowledge, there is no culture in a society. Language in it widest sense is a tool par excellence in the hands of society, and with its help both the subjective and objective aspects of socially constructed reality come together and cohere. It can also provide alternative models for reality construction. And in plural societies different communities or groups do have the capacity to raise appropriate models of reality, which then act back on that community creating a two way bridge for communication.

4.11 Conclusion

The whole question then is that of the internalisation of the social reality, both objective and subjective, and this happens as a dialectic between man and his social structure. In fact the entire idea is to strike a balance between nature and culture if the persistence of the social reality is not to be disrupted. Thus successful socialisation is that in which there is a high degree of consonance or adjustment. Between the outer and inner realities, so that the human is an active participator in social process rather than being simply at the mercy of societal procedures and rules.

At this point we reach a caveat and this is the fact that often socialisation is not effective. This happens when the phenomena of individualism takes root in a society and creates humans who do not subscribe wholly to the social order and social reality. In such instances we find that there are various socially available procedures to bring the deviants from the overall ideology back to the common fold. Such is the role of counselors, psychiatrists, shamans saints and others.

We may ask at this point why socialisation does not work in many cases? One reason could be the fact that the concerned human child is being subjected to two different discourses on the social reality. Thus if husband and wife are not consonant in their behaviour it the child or children which are now unable to adopt in to any existing discourse on reality and may have two or more systems in their consciousness. Such instances may often turn so serious, and the deviance is so disruptive of social process that such members may have to be isolated in a hospital to help them get over their conflict and confusion regarding the apprehension of one single reality, usually backed by the dominant version of reality.

This is a fascinating area of research, and we find that problems of internalising the social structure by members is becomingly increasingly difficult in the modern and postmodern worlds, where the stress on individuality is very great. Individuality implies putting ones own perspective in the place of the given perspective of social reality. This usually causes a rupture in the socially

accepted definition of reality where all members are supposed to be integrated and cohere and cooperate with each other. Instead in present day global society what is valued above all is creative integrity, and this implies evolving some basic model or paradigm which is not really subscribing to the total paradigm but to a very specific and important part of it. This implies that we can study the social construction of reality in different ways, and modern man is realizing increasingly that individual or community interpretations of social reality and social order, are not to be rectified, except in extreme situations, where it is not a dissonance with society but a breakdown of the entire edifice of social reality. However as all plural societies indicate plural versions of reality will dominate so long as the social structure is capable of taking the strain. In fact now-a-days the move is away from monolithic models of societal explanation to micro models of social behaviour.

4.12 Further Reading

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Unit 5

Concept and Theories of Structure

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

☐   explain the concept of social structure

☐   compare the theoretical contribution of Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard

☐   critically discuss Irvi-strauss's concept of structure.

5.1   Introduction

The term 'structure' (Latin *structura* from *struere*, to construct) was first applied to 'construction'. Later, during the classical period, it was used in the scientific field of biology. To grasp the meaning of this oft-used concept in sociology and social anthropology (and now, in other social sciences), let us begin with the analogy of a house.

Irrespective of the type of community to which a house belongs, it is divided into rooms, with each room set apart for conducting a particular set of activities. For instance, one room may be used for cooking foods and keeping raw ingredients and utensils for cooking, and it may be called the kitchen. Another room may be used for housing the idols and pictures of sacred deities and ancestors, and stacking sacred books and objects (such as lamps, incense sticks, peacock feathers, etc), and it may be called the place of worship, while another room may be used for spreading the bed, keeping clothes, money and jewelry, storing grains, as happens in rural communities, and it may called the bedroom. In this way, depending upon the purpose(s), the other rooms of the house may be set aside, given some sort of specialisation and name. Terms like 'study room', 'store', 'guest room', 'toilet', 'bathroom', 'pantry', 'anteroom', 'children's room', etc, all indicate the purpose for which a particular portion of the land is marked, and thus designated. Where the tract of land is less, many of these 'rooms' may not be there, but rather different corners of the same room may be associated with different tasks and activities, so one of its sides may be used for cooking, while another, for keeping deities.

Different rooms of a house are all interconnected. Passages, alleyways, and corridors link different rooms, thus facilitating mobility from one part to the other. Entry to rooms is through doors and their connection with the outside world is through doors, windows and ventilators. When all of them are shut,

the room becomes a well-demarcated and closed unit, bearing little interaction with the external world, and when open, it is constantly interacting with the other parts of the house. Each room has its own boundary, its distinctiveness, which separates it from other rooms. At the same time, it is not an 'isolated entity', for it is defined (as a bed room or study room) as a distinct entity in relation to the other rooms, which are also defined distinctly. In other words, the 'wholeness of the room', looking from one point of view, by stationing oneself in the room, is juxtaposed to 'its being a part of the house', when one looks at it by situating oneself outside it.

Pursuing this analogy further, a village or a neighbourhood may be described as an aggregate of houses, where each village or neighbourhood maintains its 'wholeness', at the same time, it is a part of the larger units. Each village or neighbourhood maintains its boundary, its identity, and also, has several connections (quite like the passages, alleyways, and corridors) with other villages or neighbourhoods. The relevant concepts that emerge from this analogy are of the 'whole', the 'interconnections', the 'boundary-maintaining mechanisms', the 'aggregation', and the 'vantage point of the observer'.

Like a house (or a village or a neighbourhood), a society may be conceptualised (or imagined) as consisted of parts. One needs to begin with this analogy, because society does not have the kind of concreteness one finds in a house, village, or neighbourhood. In fact, the method of analogy is useful for trying to know the unknown through the known. One knows what a house is, what it looks like, and by extending its model, one tries to formulate a tentative idea of society. However, it should not be forgotten that analogy is not homology: the idea that society is like a house does not imply that society is a house. Thus, after drawing similarities between a society and a house, one should also look at the differences between them, for such an exercise will direct us to the uniqueness of society – the distinct properties of society.

In their attempts to formulate the idea of society, different scholars have adopted different analogies. Herbert Spencer (1873) is one of the first ones to use the analogy of building, with which we have also begun. But of all the analogies that were used in the formative stage of sociology to comprehend the idea of society, the most frequently used analogy has been of the organism: Society is like an organism (Rex 1961). In addition to the analogy of building, Spencer also develops the organic analogy, believing that this analogy will be greatly valid if we are able to show not only that society is like an organism but also that 'organism is like society' (see Barnes, H.E. 1948; Harris 1968). Why organic analogy is used more than other analogies – such as of the solar system, and later, of atomic and chemical systems – is because an organism is far more concrete than other systems, and is easy to understand, comprehend, and explain. This analogy was basic to the understanding of the concept of social structure, a term used for the first time by Spencer.

In this unit, we will explore the meaning of the term structure and then go on to examining the contributions of Radcliffe-Brown, Evans Pritchard and Levi-Strauss to the understanding of social structure.

5.2 Organic Analogy and Structure

The principal unit of an organism is a cell, which combines with others of its kind to form a tissue. An aggregate of tissues is an organ, and an aggregate

of organs is an organism. Thus, an organism can be broken down into organs, an organ into tissues, a tissue into cells, and from the latter, one of them can be taken up for study. In a similar fashion, the basic unit of society is a 'socialised individual', one who has internalized the norms and values, and the ways of meaningful social behaviour. A collectivity of individuals is a group, and several of them combine together to form a community. An aggregate of communities is called society. As in the case of organism, a society can be broken down into communities, which in turn can be divided into groups, and groups into individuals.

Organic analogy is quite useful as a starting point, but it should not be regarded as an end in itself, for it breaks down at many levels. For instance, a single cell can survive; there are organisms made up of single cells. But no individual can survive alone; the most elemental unit of human society is a dyad, i.e., a group of two individuals. Aristotle had said long time back: 'One who lives alone is either a beast or god.' Organic analogy helps us to understand the concepts of society and its structure, but it should not blind us to the specificities of society, not found in other systems of natural and biological world.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1999) gives three meanings of the term structure: 1) the way in which something is organised, built, or put together (e.g., the structure of the human body); 2) a particular system, pattern, procedure, or institution (e.g., class structure, salary structure); and 3) a thing made up of several parts put together in a particular way (e.g., a single-storey structure). When a sociologist speaks of structure, he has all the three meanings in his mind. By structure, he means an 'interconnectedness' of parts, i.e., the parts of a society are not isolated entities, but are brought together in a set of relationships to which the term structure may be used.

Everything has a structure. Unless it is there, the entity will not be able to carry out any tasks; it will not be able to work. When its structure breaks down, or is jeopardized, it stops working, becomes inert, thereby affecting the activities of the other systems because they are all interconnected. Why the parts are connected in particular manner is because of the logical and rational relationship between them. For those who regard structure as an important analytical concept, the world is an organized entity; it comprises interconnected parts, where each part is to be studied in relationship with other parts. To sum up: 'Structure refers to the way in which the parts of an entity are interconnected so that the entity emerges as an integrated whole, which for the purpose of analysis can be broken down into individual parts.'

No dispute exists in sociology with respect to the idea that structure means an 'interconnectedness of parts', but it exists as to the identity of these parts – whether these parts are individuals, or groups, or roles, or institutions, or messages. In other words, the question is: Which of these parts should receive our primary attention? Second, a difference of opinion exists whether the structure is an empirical entity, something that can be seen and observed, or is an abstraction, arrived at from the regularity and consistency of human behaviour. Around these two ideas are built different theories of social structure. Robert Merton (1975) is quite right in saying that the notion of social structure is 'polyphyletic and polymorphous', i.e., it has many meanings and ideas.

5.3 Social Structure is a Reality: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's Contribution

As said earlier, Spencer coined the term social structure, but did not offer a theoretical perspective on it, except for advancing the analogy between societies and organisms, which influenced later scholars in developing the concepts of structure and function. For instance, Émile Durkheim (1938 [1895]), although a staunch critic of Spencer, was greatly attracted to organic analogy, and said that the idea of function in social sciences was based on analogy between the living organism and society. He used the term 'social morphology', by which he meant what we mean by the term 'social structure'.

Durkheim's sociology exercised an indelible impact on the British social anthropologist, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who was a student of the diffusionist W.H.R. Rivers, and had carried out his first-hand fieldwork with the Andaman Islanders from 1906 to 1908. The findings of this field study were first submitted in the form of an M.A. dissertation in 1910. Subsequently, it was reworked for a book published in 1922 titled *The Andaman Islanders*, which is regarded as one of the first important books leading to the foundation of the functional approach. Besides his contribution to what he called the 'structural-functional approach', one of his important contributions was to the understanding of the concept of social structure. As said previously, there are scholars prior to Radcliffe-Brown who had used the term social structure, but it was Radcliffe-Brown (1952) who not only defined this concept but also initiated a debate on it. Throughout his teaching, he emphasised the importance of the *study of social structure*. This submission of Radcliffe-Brown was closely linked to his notion of social anthropology, which he was quite willing to call after Durkheim, 'comparative sociology'.

a) A Natural Science of Society

For Radcliffe-Brown (1948), social anthropology is the 'theoretical natural science of human society'. That is to say, social phenomena are investigated by methods similar to those used in natural and biological sciences. Each of the sciences has a subject matter that can be investigated through our senses. Thus, the subject matter is empirical, which can be subjected to observation. Radcliffe-Brown pursues the analogy of the natural science: all natural sciences systematically investigate the 'structure of the universe as it is revealed to us through our senses'. Each branch of science deals with a 'certain class or kind of structures' — for instance, atomic physics deals with the structure of atoms, chemistry with the structure of molecules, anatomy and physiology with the structure of organisms. Then, it moves further with the aim to 'discover the characteristics of all structures of that kind'. Each science endeavours to understand *a* structure with which it is concerned, and then, all the structures of that type are compared to discover their common characteristics. All sciences move from particular to general, from understanding *a* structure to understanding *the* structure.

If social anthropology is a natural science of society, then its subject matter must be amenable to observation and empirical enquiry. Social structure is what social anthropologists study; it is the province of their enquiry. It is observable; it has a concrete reality. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) writes: 'Social structures are just as real as are individual organisms.' It is clear that Radcliffe-Brown's concept of social structure is tied to his natural science conception of social anthropology.

b) The Content of Social Structure

When we speak of structure, we have in mind, as said earlier, some sort of an ordered arrangement of parts or components. A piece of musical composition has a structure, and its parts are notes. Similarly, a sentence has a structure: its parts are words, so does a building, the parts of which are bricks and mortar. The basic part of social structure is the person. Here, Radcliffe-Brown (1952) makes an important distinction between an 'individual' and a 'person'. As an individual, 'he is a biological organism', comprising a large number of molecules organised in a complex way, which keeps on carrying out a multitude of physiological and psychological functions till the time he is alive. This aspect of human beings — the 'individual' aspect — is an object of study for biological and psychological sciences.

As a 'person', the human being is a 'complex of social relationships'. It is the unit of study for sociologists and social anthropologists. As a person, he is a citizen of a country, a member of a family, a supporter of a political party, a follower of a religious cult, a worker in a factory, a resident of a neighbourhood, and so on. Each of these positions the person occupies denotes a social relationship, because each position is related to another position. A person is a member of a family in relation to other members and the set of interrelationships of the members of a family constitutes its structure. Each person occupies, therefore, a 'place in a social structure'. Radcliffe-Brown uses the term 'social personality' for the 'position' a human being occupies in a social structure. It however does not imply that the position remains the same throughout the life of an individual, for it changes over time. New positions are added; old are deleted. We study persons in terms of social structure and we study social structures in terms of persons who are the unit of what it is composed.

Society is not a 'haphazard conjunction of persons', rather an organised system where norms and values control the relationships between persons. A person knows how he is expected to behave according to these norms and values, and is 'justified in expecting that other persons should do the same.' Radcliffe-Brown includes the following two aspects within the social structure:

1) All social relations of person to person, i.e., interpersonal relations. For example, the kinship structure of any society consists a number of dyadic relations, such as father and son, mother and daughter, mother's brother and sister's son, etc.

2) The differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role. For instance, the relation between men and women, chief and commoners, employers and employees, etc, are aspects of social structure, for they determine social relations between people.

In both cases, we are in fact concerned with relations between persons, which norms and values of that society condition.

Bringing these together, Radcliffe-Brown says that social structure is that concrete reality that comprises the 'set of actually existing relations at a given moment of time, which link together certain human beings.' We can conduct direct observation on social structure – we can see the 'actually existing relations', describe and classify them, and understand the relations of persons with others. Social structure is observable, empirical, and fully amenable to study by methods of natural and biological sciences.

c) **Structural Type**

When a social anthropologist carries out his fieldwork in a particular, territorially defined, society, what he actually investigates is its social structure, i.e., 'an actually existing concrete reality, to be directly observed.' But from what he observes, he abstracts a general picture of that society. In this context, Radcliffe-Brown makes a distinction between 'social structure' and 'structural type or form'. This distinction is also related with Radcliffe-Brown's conception of science, and of social anthropology as a 'natural science of society'. He says that as distinguished from history (or biography), science is not concerned with the particular or unique. It is concerned, rather, with the general, with propositions that apply to the entire phenomenon. We are concerned with, he says, 'the form of the structure'.

Say, in the study of an Australian tribe, an anthropologist is concerned with the relationship between the mother's brother and sister's son. He observes several instances of this relationship in their actual context, from which he abstracts its 'general or normal' form, which is largely invariant. If social structure is bound by factors of time and space, varying from one context to another, structural type is general and invariant.

Social structure continues over time, a kind of continuity that Radcliffe-Brown calls 'dynamic continuity'. It is like the 'organic structure of a living body'. As a living body constantly renews itself by replacing its cells and energy level, in the same way, the actual 'social life renews the social structure.' Relations between people change over time. New members are recruited in a society because of birth or immigration. While the social structure changes over time, there remains an underlying continuity and relative constancy, which designates its structural form.

Reflection and Action 5.1

What does Radlliffe-Brown mean by dynamic continuity?

This certainly does not imply that the structural form is static — it also changes, sometimes gradually, sometimes with suddenness, as happens in cases of revolution. But even then, some kind of a continuity of structure is maintained. Our job as sociologists and social anthropologists is to discover the structural form of society. It is to move from particular to general, or in the language of Radcliffe-Brown, from 'ideographic' to 'nomothetic'. While the former designates a specific social structure, the latter is the structural form. While the former requires an intensive study of a single society, the latter is an abstraction of the form of that society. Also, the study of a single society needs to be compared with similar studies of other societies. This process, systematically carried out, can lead us to the discovery of general laws that apply to human society as a whole.

For Radcliffe-Brown, the various steps of reaching the general laws are:

1) Intensive study of a social structure using the standard anthropological procedures.

2) Abstraction from this its structural type.

3) Comparing the structural type of a social structure with the structural types of other social structures, by rigorously using the comparative method.

4) Arriving at the laws of society, the invariant propositions that explain human behaviour in diverse social situations.

For Radcliffe-Brown, there is only *one* method of social anthropology, i.e., the comparative method, for it helps us to move from the particular to the general. Social structure is what we study, but what we arrive at is the structural type.

d) Society and Social Structure

Radcliffe-Brown's attempt was praiseworthy, for it was the first rigorous attempt to define the concept of social structure, rather than just taking its meaning for granted. However, it led to many questions and confusions. If social structure is a collectivity of interpersonal relations, real and observable, then what is society? Do we study society and find its structure? In his letter to Claude Lévi-Strauss, Radcliffe-Brown gave the following example: 'When I pick up a particular sea-shell on the beach, I recognize it as having a particular structure' (see Kuper, ed., 1977). The question that immediately comes in our mind is: What do I study? The seashell or its structure? Pursuing the example further, Radcliffe-Brown says: 'I may find other shells of the same species which have a similar structure, so that I can say there is a form of structure characteristic of the species.' Here, do I describe the structure of each of these shells and then subject their structures to comparison? Or, do I assume that since they all happen to be seashells, they will have a similar structure?

Further, Radcliffe-Brown writes: 'By examining a number of different species, I may be able to recognize a certain general structural form or principle, that of a helix, which could be expressed by means of logarithmic equation.' Do I compare different species of seashells to arrive at their general structural form? Or, do I compare the structural forms of each of the species of seashells to reach at a structural form that is common to all? These questions clearly show that while there is no confusion between the categories of particular and general, confusion prevails with respect to the distinction between 'society' and 'social structure', 'social life' and 'social structure', and the 'structural form' of a social structure and the 'structural form' of social structures. One more observation: what Radcliffe-Brown understands by the term 'structural type' is what many understand by the term 'social structure'. And, what Radcliffe-Brown calls 'social structure' is what many would call 'society'.

5.4 Social Structure Refers to Relations Between Groups: The Contribution of E.E. Evans-Pritchard

Radcliffe-Brown's paper on social structure, originally the Presidential Address to the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in 1940, referred to Evans-Pritchard's idea of social structure. While Radcliffe-Brown did not disagree with Evans-Pritchard's use of social structure, he found it more useful to include under the term social structure a good deal more than what Evans-Pritchard had included. Evans-Pritchard delineated his concept of social structure in the last section of the last chapter of his book, *The Nuer* (1940).

Evans-Pritchard carried out a piece of intensive fieldwork with the Nuer of

the Sudan. In his first monograph on them, he tried to describe Nuer society on a more abstract plane of analysis than was usual at that time because of a lack of a proper theory. Evans-Pritchard looked for such a theory in his work on the Nuer, although many of his ideas that exercised impact on sociology and social anthropology developed later.

In his monograph on the Nuer, he first gives an account of the importance of cattle for the life of the people he had studied. The ecological system in which they find themselves conditions their territorial distribution and transhumance. The Nuer concepts of time and space arise largely from their patterns of livelihood. Then, Evans-Pritchard examines the territorial sections which form their political system, in the absence of a centralised political authority. The Nuer are a good example of a stateless (or, acephalous) society. Their discussion has given rise to the concept of segmentary political system, where social order is largely a function of the opposition and balance of different sections of society.

Evans-Pritchard's description of the elements of Nuer society and their interrelationship guided him to the concept of social structure. Instead of beginning with the idea of person, as did Radcliffe-Brown, he began with viewing social structure in terms of groups. To quote him (1940: 262):

By social structure we mean relations between groups which have a high degree of consistency and constancy.

Structure is an 'organised combination of groups'. Individuals come and go, they are recruited and eliminated over time, but the groups remain the same, for 'generation after generation of people pass through them' (1940: 262). The processes of life and death condition individuals, but the structure of society endures. It is clear that for Evans-Pritchard, social structure deals with units which are largely invariant, i.e., groups. What Radcliffe-Brown means by 'structural form' is what Evans-Pritchard means by 'social structure'. The groups considered for describing social structure may be called 'structural groups' – the examples of which among the Nuer are territorial groups, lineages and age-sets.

Evans-Pritchard does not consider the family as a 'structural group'. It is because he thinks that the family does not have the kind of consistency and constancy which other groups have. A family disappears at the death of its members and a new family comes into existence. However, it does not imply that the family is less important, for it is 'essential for the preservation of the structure' (1940: 262). New members are born into family, which maintain the system and its continuity. This formulation of structure, Evans-Pritchard clarifies, does not imply that the groups — consistent and constant — that constitute the structure are static. Territorial, lineage and age-set systems do change, but slowly, and 'there is always the same kind of interrelationship between their segments.'

Reflecting on the example of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard says that the tribe is not a haphazard congregation of residential units. Every local group is segmented, and these segments are fused in relation to other groups. Because of this, each unit can only be defined in terms of the whole system. One may conceptualise a society as a 'system of groups' in which relations exist between 'groups of persons', and these relations are structural relations. Thus, structure is a 'relation between groups'. These relations can be spoken

of in terms of a system. Evans-Pritchard considers kinship relations as a kinship system; or, one may speak of political relations as a political system.

This brings us to the issue of defining a group. For Evans-Pritchard, a group is a congregation of people who consider themselves as a distinct unit in relation to the other units. The members of a group have a discernible sense of identity and they are defined so by other groups. Among the members of a group exist reciprocal obligations. They are expected to fuse together whenever they encounter an issue pertaining to their group or one of its members. The 'vengeance groups' are formed on this basis. Their aim is to avenge the death of one of their members. In a case of homicide, the members of the group of the slain become one as opposed to the members of the group of the slayer, thus emerge two 'structurally equivalent and mutually opposed groups'. In this sense, the segments of a tribe, a lineage, and an age-set are all examples of groups. However, a man's kindred does not constitute a group, and so do the members of a neighbouring tribe or the strangers.

To sum up: for Evans-Pritchard, the parts of social structure, among which structural relations are to be described, are groups that endure over time. Social structure is not an empirical entity for him. From the study of the social relations of people, we move on to an understanding of their groups. When we describe the relations between groups, we are already on our way of describing their social structure. Therefore, social structure is an anthropologist's abstraction from the existing reality. It should be kept in mind here that for Evans-Pritchard (1951), social anthropology is not a branch of natural science, as it is for Radcliffe-Brown, but it is a kind of historiography. Its kinship is with history, and not natural and biological sciences.

5.5 Social Structure is a Model: Contributions of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edmund Leach

Perhaps the most provocative and debatable contribution to the concept of social structure was that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French structuralist, who is famous for his ingenious cross-cultural analysis of myths and kinship systems. If for functionalism, society is a 'kind of living creature', consisting of parts, which can be 'dissected and distinguished', for structuralism, it is the analogy from language that helps us in conceptualizing society. From the study of a given piece of language, the linguist tries to arrive at its grammar, the underlying rules which make an expression meaningful, although the speakers of that language may not know about it. Similarly, the structuralist from a given piece of social behaviour tries to infer its underlying structure. In structuralism, the shift is from observable behaviour to structure, from organic analogy to language (Barnard 2000).

Further, structuralism submits that the set of relations between different parts can be transformed into 'something' that appears to be different from what it was earlier. It is the idea of transformation — of one into another — that lies at the core of structuralism, rather than the quality of relations. Edmund Leach (1968: 486) has given a good example to illustrate this. A piece of music can be transformed in a variety of ways. It is written down, played on a piano, recorded on a phonographic record, transmitted over the radio, and finally played back to the audience. In each case, the piece of music passes through a 'whole series of transformations'. It appears as 'printed notes, as a pattern of finger movements, as sound waves, as modulations of

the grooves on a piece of bakelite, as electromagnetic vibrations, and so on.' But what is common to all these manifestations of music, one different from the other, and each conditioned by its own rules, is their structure. In a similar fashion, while different societies vary, what remains invariant (and common) to them is their structure. Lévi-Strauss (1963) aptly showed this in one of his studies where he compared the totemic society of the Australian Aborigines with Indian caste system, and found that both of them had the same structure. If for Radcliffe-Brown, structure is observable, for Lévi-Strauss, it is an abstract concept. If for Radcliffe-Brown, what persists is the 'structure' of a particular society, at a particular point of time and place, for Lévi-Strauss, what persists is the 'structure of the entire human society' (Barnes, R.H. 2001).

In his celebrated essay of 1953 in A.L. Kroeber's *Anthropology Today*, titled 'Social Structure', Lévi-Strauss says that social structure is not a field of study; it is not a 'province of enquiry'. We do not study social structure, but it is an explanatory method and can be used in any kind of social studies. In opposition to Radcliffe-Brown, Lévi-Strauss says that the term 'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality. It refers to the models that are built up from empirical reality. He writes: '...the object of social-structure studies is to understand social relations with the help of models' (1953: 532). Social structure is a model; it is a method of study.

Here, Lévi-Strauss distinguishes the concept of social structure from that of social relations. The latter are the 'raw data of social experience' – they are the relations between people, empirical and observable. It is from social relations that models comprising the social structure are built. Although the models are built from raw, empirical reality, they cannot be reduced to it. The ensemble of social relations in a given society can be described, but social structure is an anthropologist's construction, built for the purpose of analysis.

Reflection and Action 5.2

How does Levi-Strauss distinguish between the concept of social structure and social relations?

Lévi-Strauss makes three distinctions: first, between observation and experimentation on models; second, the conscious and unconscious character of the models; and third, between mechanical and statistical models. The observation of social relations and the construction of models after these facts need to be distinguished from 'experiments' on models. By experimentation, Lévi-Strauss means the 'controlled comparison' of models of the same or of a different kind, with an intention to identify the model that accounts best for the observed facts. In a structural analysis, the first step is to observe the facts without any bias, then to describe them in relationship to themselves and in relation to the whole. From this, models are constructed, and in the final analysis, the best model is chosen. This distinction is with reference to the anthropologist who studies society.

By comparison, the distinction between conscious and unconscious models is made with reference to the society under study. Conscious models, also known as 'homemade models' and 'norms', are the "insider's models": they are those according to which the society views itself. Underneath these

models are 'deeper structures', the unconscious models, which the society does not perceive directly or consciously. Anthropologists principally work with the models that they construct from the deeper lying phenomena, rather than with conscious models. It is because, Lévi-Strauss says, the aim of conscious models is to 'perpetuate the phenomena' and not to 'explain' it. But, from this, we should not infer that conscious models could be dismissed, for in some cases, they are far more accurate than those that anthropologists build. Even when conscious models are inaccurate, they guide us to deeper structures.

Let us now come to the last distinction. The classic formulation of mechanical models is that they are those models which lie on the same scale as the phenomenon is. And, when they — the model and the phenomenon — lie on a different scale, they are called statistical models. Unfortunately, as critics have noted, Lévi-Strauss does not explain the meaning of the 'same scale'. But from the example he has given, it seems that he is concerned with the quantitative differences between 'what people say' and 'what they do'. To make it clear, Lévi-Strauss gives the example of the laws of marriage. When there is no difference between marriage rules and social groupings — the two are placed on the same scale — the model formed will be mechanical. And when several factors affect the type of marriage and people have no option but to deviate from the rule, the model formed will be statistical.

Box 5.2: Edmund Leach on Social Structure

The British anthropologist, Edmund Leach (1954, 1961), also made a significant contribution to the idea of social structure as a model, although there are many significant differences between the approaches of Lévi-Strauss and Leach to structuralism. For instance, whereas Lévi-Strauss is interested in unearthing the 'universal structures' – structures applicable to all human societies at all point of time — Leach applies the method of structuralism to understand the local (or regional) structures. Because of this, some term Leach's approach 'neo-structural' (Kuper 1996 [1973]).

Leach has formulated a conception of social structure that is "essentially the same as Lévi-Strauss's" (Nutini 1970: 76). Like Lévi-Strauss, Leach divides the 'social universe' into different epistemological categories: the raw data of social experience (i.e., social relations) and the models that are built from it. Models are not empirical; they are the 'logical constructions' in the mind of the anthropologist. Like Lévi-Strauss, Leach also arrives at the distinction between the mechanical and statistical models, i.e., models built respectively on 'what people say' and 'what people do', but he calls mechanical models 'jural rules' and statistical models 'statistical norms'. The meaning Leach gives to 'jural rules' and 'statistical norms' is essentially the same which Lévi-Strauss gives to mechanical and statistical models.

But two important differences stand out. First, for Lévi-Strauss, both mechanical and statistical models are of roughly equal analytical value and they complement each other. For Leach, jural rules and statistical norms should be treated as separate frames of reference. In an analysis, the statistical norms should have priority over the jural rules. We should begin our study with the actual behaviour of people, the deviations that occur and the conformity they achieve. Second, Leach points out that mechanical models or jural rules are qualitative rules of behaviour. Sanctions support

them and they have the power of coercion. Statistical models or norms are only 'statistical averages of individual behaviour'. They do not have any coercive power.

5.6   Conclusion

The concept of social structure has been a 'pleasant puzzle', to remember the words of A.L. Kroeber (1948), to which, at one time, almost every anthropologist and sociologist tried to make a contribution, either by drawing attention to the part (or parts) of society that seemed important to the author, or by lending support to an already existing idea or theory of social structure. As noted in the beginning, the debate concerning social structure has centered around two issues: (1) Among which parts of society are there structural relations? And, (2) is social structure 'real' or a 'model' which the investigator constructs? Of the two major opinions on social structure, Lévi-Strauss's is closely connected to his method of structuralism – social structure is a 'model' devised for undertaking the study of social behaviour (relations and experiences). For Radcliffe-Brown, social structure is an 'empirical' entity, constituting the subject matter of social anthropology and sociology. In his letter to Lévi-Strauss, Radcliffe-Brown expressed his disagreement with the former's concept of social structure and the confusion clouding the idea of social structure as a 'model'. Radcliffe-Brown also thought that what meant by the term 'structural type' was what Lévi-Strauss's term 'model' implied (see Kuper, ed, 1977).

A concept of social structure that the Australian anthropologist, S.F. Nadel, proposes tries to combine the views of both Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss. In his posthumously published *The Theory of Social Structure* (1957), Nadel disagrees with Radcliffe-Brown's idea that social structure is an observable entity, but an abstraction from it. At the same time, he rejects Lévi-Strauss's view that social structure has nothing to do with empirical reality. From Radcliffe-Brown, he borrows the idea that each person occupies a position in the social structure, but from an empirical level of inter-personal interaction, he moves to a level of abstraction where the person becomes the actor who plays a role with respect to the others. This abstraction, however, does not imply that it loses touch with reality. Nadel (1957: 150) writes:

I consider social structure, of whatever degree of refinement, to be still the social reality itself, or an aspect of it, not the logic behind it...

For Nadel, the components of social structure are roles and the pattern (or design) of interconnected roles constitutes the social structure of a society. His definition of social structure is as follows (1957: 12):

We arrive at the structure of a society through abstracting from the concrete population and its behaviour the pattern or network (or 'system') of relationships obtaining 'between actors in their capacity of playing roles relative to one another'.

Besides Nadel, some other sociologists have also emphasised the importance of roles in defining social structure. Parsons (1961), for example, says that the structure of a social system is defined with respect to the 'institutionalized patterns of normative culture'. Norms vary according to, first, the position of actors in interactive situations, and second, the type of activity. Norms define roles, with the corresponding rules of behaviour, and they also

constitute the institutions. The aim of social structure is to regulate human behaviour. In his conception of social structure, Peter Blau (1977) also speaks of the 'social positions among which a population is distributed.' Some of these concepts of social structure have been put to test in empirical situation. For instance, Blau and Schwartz (1984) applied Blau's ideas to understand real life.

5.7   Further Reading

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Unit 6
Structure and Function

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to

▫   explain the premises of functionalism

▫   discuss the relevance of the concept of function in understanding society

▫   compare and contrast the theoretical approach of Radcliffe-brown, Malinowski and parsons.

6.1   Introduction

Functionalism is the name of an approach in social anthropology and sociology according to which a society is a whole of interconnected parts, where each part contributes to the maintenance of the whole. The task of sociology is to find out the contribution of each part of society and how society works together as an ordered arrangement of parts. Literally, the word 'function' (from Latin, *fungi*, *functio*, to effect, perform, execute) means 'to perform' or 'to serve' (a purpose). In the field of architecture, it implies that a form should be adapted to usage and material. In areas such as politics and management, it means 'getting things to work'. The word is used in mathematics (in the sense of 'A is a function of B'); it is used in everyday conversation, where it may mean 'job' or 'purpose' (for instance, 'What is your function in the office'?). In fact, what I am asking in the latter question is 'what do you do in your office', and for the act of doing I am using the word 'function'. This word is also used for celebrations and festal occasions, such as 'inaugural function', 'marriage function', etc. In other words, 'function' is a multi-meaning and multi-usage term. Levy, Jr. (1968: 22) writes: 'Perhaps the major difficulty associated with the general concept of function has been the use of a single term to cover several distinctly different referents.'

As a distinct approach, as a way of looking at and analysing society, functionalism emerged first in social anthropology in early twentieth century, and later in sociology, beginning in the 1930s. However, its roots are as ancient as the concept of organic analogy, used in the philosophy of Antiquity by Plato (B.C. 428/7-345/7) and Aristotle (B.C. 384-322). The concept of 'purpose' or 'end' goes back to Aristotle's reference to the *telos* (purpose) of things as their *final cause*. The idea of a latent *telos* is also found in Adam Smith's metaphor of the 'invisible hand' as the automatic mechanism that maximises wealth, individual welfare, and economic efficiency through the increase in labour. It is from *telos* that the word 'teleology' has come, which means that 'everything is determined by a purpose' and the scholars should find out what that purpose is.

Some writers regard Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century scholar, writing after the French Revolution, as the 'father of sociology', because in his writings, one finds a coexistence of two ideas — one from which a scientific study of society emerged, and the other which contributed substantially to the growth of Marxian theory (Giddens 1973). The first idea is that 'scientific methods' should be used for the study of society, and the second is that each society contains in it the germs of its contradiction, because of which it changes over time. Saint-Simon also recognises revolution as an important process of change.

It is the first thought of studying a society scientifically that Auguste Comte (1789-1857), the collaborator of Saint-Simon and the person who has coined the term 'sociology', fully develops under the rubric of what he calls 'positivism' or 'positive philosophy'. In this view, the methods for the study of society come from natural and biological sciences. The aim of the study is to discover the 'laws of evolution' as well as the 'laws of functioning' of society, i.e., 'how has the society evolved with the passage of time and what are the various stages through which it has passed' and 'how does the society function (or work) at a particular point of time.' The knowledge thus generated, Comte thinks, will help us to bring about desirable changes in society, in carrying out the tasks of social reconstruction and amelioration. Comte's aim is to make sociology a 'science of society', quite like the natural and biological sciences, and assign it a place in the hierarchy of sciences. For Comte, being the most general and most specific subject, sociology occupies the summit of the hierarchy of sciences: it is the 'queen of sciences'.

In this unit we expose the concept of function in sociological writings. We begin with the basic premises of functionalism and them look into the theoretical contributions of Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, and Parsons.

6.2   From Positivism to Functionalism

The thesis of functionalism lies in the philosophy of positivism. Comte also makes use of the analogy of society as an organism. Organic analogy has aided the viewing of society as a system of interrelated parts, a view basic to the functional approach. The immediate forerunner of functionalism in sociology is Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), who is a sharp critic of Comte as well as influenced by his ideas, for which he has earned in the words of Alvin Gouldner (1973) the distinction of being 'uneasy Comtean'.

Like Comte, Durkheim is keenly interested in defining the subject matter of sociology as distinct from that of philosophy or biology. For him, sociology is a comparative and an objective study of 'social facts', which are the 'ways of thinking, acting and feeling' that have the 'noteworthy property' of existing outside the 'individual consciousness'. Social facts do not originate in the individual but in the collectivity, in the 'collective mind' (*l' âme collective*). Because they exist outside the individual, they can be studied in the same way as one studies the material objects. Social facts are *comme des choses*, i.e., they are 'things', perceived objectively and outside the individual. This however does not mean that they are as tangible as are the 'material things'. Instead, for their study one uses the same frame of mind which one uses for the study of natural and biological objects that constitute the subject matter of natural and biological sciences. Like Comte, Durkheim also believes that the methods of natural and biological sciences can be used

for the study of social facts. But, these methods are not to be used as they are, rather their suitable application to the science of social facts should be thoughtfully and critically investigated. Durkheim's book titled *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) was basically concerned with these issues.

Box 6.1: Sociological Explanations

From the study of social facts, sociologists offer what Durkheim calls 'sociological explanations'. Each sociological explanation is consisted of two parts: to quote Durkheim (1895: 123) here: '...to explain a social phenomenon the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfills must be investigated separately.' The first component of the sociological explanation is the 'causal-historical explanation': to delineate the cause(s) which produce a phenomenon by examining historical sources rather than indulging in what Radcliffe-Brown calls 'conjectural history'. The second component is 'functional', i.e., the contribution that a part makes to society 'in the establishment of...general harmony' (Durkheim 1895: 125).

Durkheim's definition of function has tremendously influenced the writings of later functionalists, both in social anthropology and sociology. For him, function is the 'contribution' a part makes to the whole for its 'maintenance and well being'. Thus, function is a 'positive contribution': it is inherently good for society (the whole), for it ensures its continuity and healthy maintenance. By making its contribution, each part fulfills one of the needs or needs (*besoin*) of society. Once needs have been fulfilled, society will be able to survive and endure. Durkheim applies this framework of social function in all his studies.

For instance, in his doctoral work, which was on the division of labour, Durkheim (1893) rejects Darwin's idea that once the size of a human population increases, there will be a struggle for existence and those who happen to be fit will survive, while the rest will be eliminated. Instead of lending support to the theory of competition, conflict and elimination, Durkheim shows that as human population increases, society becomes more and more differentiated with the division of labour moving towards the specialisation of jobs. Rather than competing with others for survival, human beings are able to depend on one another, for each specialises in a particular work. Specialisation makes each one of the beings important for society.

Durkheim also rejects the explanations of the division of labour that economists and psychologists had advanced – such as 'the division of labour increases economic efficiency and productivity', or 'it induces happiness', or its opposite, 'it makes people bored with their jobs'. He is critical of the utilitarian (i.e., economic) and individualistic (i.e., psychological) explanations, because according to him none of them actually explains the real function of the division of labour, the contribution it makes to society. For him, the function of the division of labour is sociological: it contributes to social solidarity. Modern industrial society is integrated because of the interdependence that comes into existence with the specialisation of jobs. In his study of Australian totemism, he shows that the function of religion is to produce solidarity in society, 'to bind people in a moral community called church' (Durkheim 1915).

Durkheim is particularly interested in showing that the function of social facts is moral. Social institutions work to produce the goal of integration.

With this perspective, he is able to account for the phenomena that to many may appear 'unhealthy' for society. For example, he regards crime as a 'normal' and 'healthy' feature of all societies, because it reinforces collective sentiments and works towards the evolution of morality and law. He argues that the existence of criminal behaviour constitutes an index of the flexibility of society. A normal rate of crime indicates that the society lacks the total authority to 'suppress' all 'divergences' of the individual. Crime shows the existence of social conditions that enable individuals to express them as 'individuals'. However, if crime exceeds the normal limits, then it becomes unhealthy (or 'pathological'), jeopardizing the normal functioning of society. As is clear, Durkheim distinguishes between the 'normal' and the 'pathological' forms of social facts. What is general in a society is normal and what is not is pathological. The former performs the function of integrating society, whereas the latter, thwarts the process of integration. Therefore, it needs to be brought under control with the help of concerted collective action. Durkheim is also in favour of undertaking the attempts towards social amelioration, but they should follow a rigorous sociological study of the phenomenon.

6.3   The Premises of Functionalism

Durkheim is not a 'functionalist' in the sense in which this term has come to be used for the approach that the British social anthropologists, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), have espoused. Durkheim does not use the term 'functionalism', although he defines the concept of social function, as we noted previously, and the second part of his sociological explanation deals with the functional explanation. One comes across in Durkheim's works a fine coexistence of the diachronic (genetic, evolutionary, and historical) and the synchronic (society 'here and now') approaches to the study of society, but it is quite clear that the study of the contemporary society occupies a preferred place in his writings. For instance, in his celebrated study of religion, he begins with a consideration of Australian totemism as the most elementary form of religious life, but he does not start speculating it as the earliest form and then, as his predecessors had done, offering theories to explain it. He is rather more concerned with the structure and function of totemism and how its study can help us in understanding the place of religion in complex societies. This emphasis on the study of synchronous (or 'present') societies exerted a tremendous impact on later scholars.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the continuation of the old evolutionary approach and also, its gradual decline. It also witnessed the rise of functionalism. Adam Kuper (1973) thinks that 1922 was the 'year of wonder' (*annus mirabilis*) of functionalism, for in this year were published two monographs that substantiated the functional approach. One was by Radcliffe-Brown titled *The Andaman Islanders*, and the other, by Malinowski, titled *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. The impact of anthropological functionalism was felt in other disciplines, particularly sociology. Although there were scholars — such as Kingsley Davis (1959) — who saw nothing new in functional approach because they thought that sociologists had always been doing what functionalists wanted them to do, there were others (such as Talcott Parsons) who were clearly impressed with the writings of functional anthropologists. As a result of the writings of these people, functionalism emerged as an extremely important approach, holding its sway till the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In its history of about 150 years, first in the

positivism of Comte, then in the 'sociologistic positivism' of Durkheim, and then, in the works of the twentieth-century functionalists, functionalism has come to comprise a number of variants and foci. Pointed differences exist between different functionalists — in fact, some of them happen to be archrivals, like Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Notwithstanding their differences, it seems that all functionalists share the following five propositions:

1) Society (or culture) is a system like any other system, such as solar system, mechanical system, atomic system, chemical system, or organic system.

2) As a system, society (or culture) consists of parts (like, institutions, groups, roles, associations, organisations), which are interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent.

3) Each part performs its own function — it makes its own contribution to the whole society (or culture) — and also, it functions in relationship with other parts.

4) A change in one part brings about a change in other parts, or at least influences the functioning of other parts, because all the parts are closely connected.

5) The entire society or culture — for which we can use the term 'whole' is greater than the mere summation of parts. It cannot be reduced to any part, or no part can explain the whole. A society (or culture) has its own identity, its own 'consciousness', or in Durkheim's words, 'collective consciousness'.

6.4 Functionalism in Social Anthropology: Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski

The first approach in social anthropology for the analysis of society was evolutionary, which though present earlier, in the writings of Comte and Spencer, was almost firmly established after the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). During the second half of the nineteenth century, almost every anthropologist was concerned with two issues. First, how was the institution (or, cultural practice, trait) established in the first place? What has been its origin? Second, what are the various stages through which it has passed to reach its contemporary state? Both the questions were important and relevant, but in the absence of authentic data, the early (or, 'classical') evolutionists extravagantly indulged in speculations and conjectures, imagining the causes (or, the factors) that gave rise to institutions and the stages of their evolution. Most of the evolutionists — barring a few possible exceptions, such as Lewis H. Morgan and Edward B. Tylor — had not themselves collected any data on which they based their generalisations. They almost completely relied upon the information that travelers, missionaries, colonial officers, and soldiers, who were in touch with non-Western societies, provided, knowing full well that much of these data might be biased, exaggerated, incomplete, and incorrect. Because they themselves did not carry out any fieldwork, they earned the notorious title of 'arm-chair anthropologists'.

Both the founders of the British functional approach (Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski) were vehemently critical of the nineteenth-century evolutionism. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) said that it was based on 'conjectural history', a term we used earlier, and not 'authentic history'. It was 'pseudo-historical', thus

devoid of a scientific value. For Malinowski (1944), classical evolutionism was a 'limbo of conjectural reconstructions'. With the works of these scholars came a shift from:

1) Arm-chair anthropology to fieldwork-based studies;

2) The study of the origin and stages of evolution of society and its institutions (diachronic studies) to society 'here and now' (synchronic studies);

3) The study of the entire societies and cultures (macro approach) to the study of particular societies, especially the small-scale societies (micro approach); and

4) An understanding of society confined to a theoretical level to putting the knowledge of society 'here and now' to practical use, to bring about desired changes in society. Rather than remaining just an 'academic study of the oddities of society' — different and bizarre customs and practices — the knowledge we have acquired should be used for improving upon the conditions of people, for improving upon the relations of local people with the outside world. Incidentally, Malinowski called this concern of anthropology 'practical anthropology'.

The scholars who later came to be known as 'functionalists' sought to shift the focus of their study from 'what society was' to 'what society is', and this study should be carried out not by speculative methods, but by living with people in their natural habitats and learning from them, from the field.

It was not against the processes of evolution and diffusion that the functionalists leveled their criticism, for they knew that they were important processes of change. In fact, both Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski thought that after they were through most of their important fieldwork-based studies, they would take up the study of the processes of evolution and diffusion. What they were against was a study of the past through 'imaginative history' rather than one based on facts. If authentic documents were available about societies, they must readily be used for some insights into change. But the functionalists noted that these documents were not available about 'primitive and pre-literate' societies, therefore we would not have any knowledge of the development of social institutions among them. Instead of speculating how they have evolved, we should study 'what they are', using the scientific methods of observation, comparison, and arriving at generalisations.

a) Structural-functional Approach of Radcliffe-Brown

Abandoning the search for origins and the pasts of institutions, and the ways in which cultural traits have diffused from one part of the world to the other, Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 180) defines each society as a 'functionally interrelated system' in which 'general laws or functions operate'. He accepts that Durkheim offered the first systematic formulation of the concept of function and that this concept is based on an 'analogy between social life and organic life'. However, with reference to Durkheim's use of the term 'need' for the conditions that must be satisfied for a system to continue, Radcliffe-Brown thinks that this term would direct us towards a postulation of 'universal human or societal needs'. As a consequence, the theory according to which events and developments are meant to fulfill a purpose and happen because of that will trap us. Known as the theory of teleology, as we said earlier, Radcliffe-Brown suspects that functionalism might become teleological. He thus substitutes for the word 'need' the term 'necessary

conditions of existence.' He believes that the question of which conditions are necessary for survival is an empirical one, and the study of a society will tell us about this. Radcliffe-Brown recognizes the 'diversity of conditions necessary for the survival of different systems.' Once we have recognized this, we shall avoid asserting that each item of a culture must have a function and that 'items in different cultures must have the same function' (Turner 1987: 48).

Radcliffe-Brown dislikes the use of the word 'functionalism', which Malinowski propagated with enthusiasm. His objection is that '-isms' (like functional*ism*) are ideologies, schools of thought, philosophies, and realms of opinions. Science does not have either of them. What it has are the methods of study, opting for those methods that are regarded as the best for study. A scientist does not have any passionate relationship with any methods. For him, they are all of equal importance and worth, but their operational value lies in carrying out a satisfactory study of a phenomenon according to the canons of scientific research.

Moreover, Radcliffe-Brown also looks at the distinction between an organism and society. For instance, an organism dies, but a society continues to survive over time, although it may be changed and transformed. An organism can be studied even when its parts have stopped working. In other words, the structure of an organism can be studied separately from its function, which is not the case with society. Social structure is observable only when it functions. Structure and function are inalienable concepts in social anthropology; that is why Radcliffe-Brown calls his approach 'structural-functional', rather than 'functional', as many have done. He writes (1952: 180):

The concept of function...involves the notion of a *structure* consisting of a *set of relations* amongst *unit entities*, the *continuity* of the structure being maintained by a *life-process* made up of the activities of the constituent units.

Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functional approach comprises the following assumptions:

1) A necessary condition for survival of a society is a minimal integration of its parts.

2) The concept of function refers to those processes that maintain the necessary integration or solidarity.

3) And, in each society, structural features can be shown to contribute to the maintenance of necessary solidarity.

For Durkheim, the central concept is of solidarity, while for Radcliffe-Brown, it is the 'structural continuity' of society. For example, in an analysis of the lineage system, according to Radcliffe-Brown, one must first assume that some minimal degree of solidarity must exist for it to continue. Then, one must examine the processes associated with the lineage system, assessing their consequences for maintaining social integration. One of the processes the investigator would come across is the role of lineage systems in adjudicating conflicts in societies where they are land-owning groups. They define who has the right to land and through which side of the family it would pass. In these societies, lineage is a 'corporate group'. Descending through these steps, one will explain the integration of the economic system.

Then, one will move to the other systems of society, analyzing at each level the contribution a part will make to the structural continuity of the whole.

Reflection and Action 6.1

What are the assumptions of Radcliffe-Brown's structural functional approach?

Radcliffe-Brown is far from being dogmatic in his assertions. For him, the functional unity (or integration) of a social system is a hypothesis. That we look for integration and structural continuity of society does not imply that it does not change. Radcliffe-Brown believes that the states of 'social health' (eunomia) and 'social illness' (dysnomia) constitute two ends of the continuum, and the actual society seems to lie somewhere in between.

b) The functionalism of Malinowski

By comparison to Radcliffe-Brown, it is Malinowski who claims the creation of a separate 'school', the 'Functional School'. The aim of functional analysis for him (1926: 132) is to arrive at the

> explanation of anthropological facts at all levels of development by their function, by the part they play within the integral system of culture.

He (1926: 132-3) assumes that

> in every civilization every custom, material object, ideas and belief fulfills some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable fact within a working whole.

Whereas Radcliffe-Brown begins with society and its necessary conditions of existence (i.e., integration), Malinowski's starting point is the individual, who has a set of 'basic' (or 'biological') needs that must be satisfied for its survival. It is because of the importance that Malinowski gives the individual that the term 'psychological functionalism' is reserved for him, in comparison to Radcliffe-Brown's approach which is called 'sociological functionalism' because in this society is the key concept.

Malinowski's approach distinguishes between three levels: the biological, the social structural, and the symbolic (Turner 1987: 50-1). Each of these levels has a set of needs that must be satisfied for the survival of the individual. It is on his survival that the survival of larger entities (such as groups, communities, societies) is dependent. Malinowski proposes that these three levels constitute a hierarchy. At the bottom is placed the biological system, followed next by the social-structural, and finally, by the symbolic system. The way in which needs at one level are fulfilled will affect the way in which they will be fulfilled at the subsequent levels.

The most basic needs are the biological, but this does not imply any kind of reductionism, because each level constitutes its distinct properties and needs, and from the interrelationship of different levels that culture emerges as an integrated whole. Culture is the kernel of Malinowski's approach. It is 'uniquely human', for it is not found to exist among sub-humans. Comprising all those things — material and non-material – that human beings have made right from the time they separated from their simian ancestors, culture has been the instrument that satisfies the biological needs of human beings. It is a need-serving and need-fulfilling system. Because of this role of culture in satisfying biological needs that Malinowski's functionalism is also known as 'bio-cultural functionalism.'

One more difference between Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski may be noted here. A concept fundamental to Malinowski — the concept of culture — is a mere epiphenomenona (secondary and incidental) for Radcliffe-Brown. He believes that the study of social structure (which for him is an observable entity) encompasses the study of culture; therefore, there is no need to have a separate field to study culture. Further, whilst social structure is concerned all about observations, what anthropologists see and hear about the individual peoples, culture is in the minds of people, not amenable to observation in the same way as social structure is. Radcliffe-Brown wants to make social anthropology a branch of natural science, which would be possible when there is an empirically investigable subject matter.

Reflection and Action 6.2

What are the major differences between the theoretical approaches of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski?

The basis of Malinowski's approach is a theory of 'vital sequences', which have a biological foundation and are incorporated into all societies. These sequences number eleven, each composed of an 'impulse', an associated physiological 'act', and a satisfaction which results from that act (see Table 6.1).

<div align="center">

Table 6.1

</div>

	Impulse	Act	Satisfaction
1.	Drive to breathe; gasping for air.	Intake of oxygen	Elimination of CO_2 in tissues Satiation
2.	Hunger	Ingestion of food	Quenching
3.	Thirst	Absorption of liquid	Detumescence
4.	Sex appetite	Conjugation	Restoration of muscular and nervous energy
5.	Fatigue	Rest	Satisfaction of fatigue
6.	Restlessness	Activity	Awakening with restored energy
7.	Somnolence	Sleep	Removal of tension Abdominal relaxation
8.	Bladder pressure	Micturition	Relaxation
9.	Colon pressure	Defecation	Return to normal state
10.	Fright	Escape from danger	
11.	Pain	Avoidance by effective act	

Permanent Vital Sequences Incorporated in All Culture

For instance, the impulse of somnolence accompanies the act of sleep, resulting in satisfaction by 'awakening with restored energy' (Malinowski 1944: 77; Barnard 2000: 68). Malinowski follows this eleven-fold paradigm with a set of seven biological needs and their respective cultural responses (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2

Basic Needs	Cultural Responses
1. Metabolism	Commissariat
2. Reproduction	Kinship
3. Bodily comfort	Shelter
4. Safety	Protection
5. Movement	Activities
6. Growth	Training
7. Health	Hygiene

For example, the first need is of food, and the cultural mechanisms are centered on the processes of food getting, for which Malinowski uses the term 'commissariat', which means the convoy that transports food. Similarly, the second need is of reproduction (biological continuity of society) and the cultural response to which is kinship concerned with regulating sex and marriage. From this, Malinowski goes on to four-fold sequences, which he calls the 'instrumental imperatives', and associates each one of them with their respective cultural responses. The four-fold sequence is of economy, social control, education, and political organisation. From here, he shifts to the symbolic system — of religion, magic, beliefs and values — examining its role in culture.

6.5 Functionalism of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert K. Merton (1910 - 2003)

In 1975, in an important article, Parsons labels his student, Robert Merton and himself 'arch-functionalists'. He also explains here why he has abandoned the term 'structural functionalism', which, at one time, he used for his approach. For him, structure refers to 'any set of relations among parts of a living system'. On empirical grounds, he says, it can be assumed or shown that these relations are stable over a time period. By process, which is the correlative concept with structure, one refers to the 'changes' that occur in the state of the system or its relevant parts. With respect to structure, the key concept is of *stability*, and with respect to process, it is of *change*. Thus, by structure, we refer to a pattern of relationships in a social system, and process refers to the changes occurring in that system. A significant characteristic of 'structural functionalism' has been that it has stressed 'structure' more than 'process'.

In the article mentioned above, Parsons states that the concept of function stands at a 'higher level of theoretical generality'. It is far more analytical than the concept of structure, or even process, although function encompasses the latter. It is because the concept of function is concerned with the 'consequences' of the existence and the nature of structures that can be empirically described. And, it is also concerned with the processes that take place in these systems. Parsons thinks that his original formulation under the rubric of 'structural functionalism' tends to analyze society as if it is static, but the new formulation, where stress is laid on the concept of function than structure, in the name of functionalism, takes much more account of change and evolution. The new formulation sets out to examine the functions of 'processes' and their consequences for 'static' structures.

For example, one may examine in the American context, the function of the process of education of women on 'static' structures like family.

Parsons' functionalism is best known in terms of the 'functional imperatives', the essential conditions required for the enduring existence of a system (Parsons 1951). Also known as the 'AGIL model' (based on the first letters of the four functions that Parsons has devised) or the 'four-function paradigm', it evolved from Parsons' collaborative work with Robert F. Bales in experiments on leadership in small groups (Rocher 1974). These four functions help us to explain how a state of balance (i.e. equilibrium) emerges in a system. One of the important problems in sociology for Parsons is what he has called the 'Hobbesian problem of order' — he calls it so after the famous political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, one of the founders of the theory of 'social contract', who was concerned with the question of how order comes in society. Parsons explores the role of these four functions in giving rise to equilibrium in a system.

Earlier it was noted that the functionalist's model of society as one of 'interdependence and self-equilibrium' is similar to the biological model of an organism. Parsons traces his interest in equilibrium to W.B. Cannon's idea of homeostatic stabilization of physiological processes and to his training in biology at Amherst College where he had studied. Also, the impact of Malinowski on him was unmistakable, especially the idea of the primacy of the biological system. In the case of society, Parsons submits that the institutions (or structures) maintain (or re-establish) equilibrium by fulfilling the 'needs', which must be satisfied if the system has to persist. Institutions (or structures) also solve the recurring problems in a manner similar to the way in which the units of the organism comparable to the institutions (or structures) of societies do in their natural environment. The system ensures that these institutions (or structures) work appropriately on everyday basis, satisfying the needs. For achieving equilibrium, society requires the processes of socialization, the internalization of societal values, and the mechanisms of social control so that deviance is checked.

All 'action systems' — and society is one of them — face four major 'problems' (or have four major 'needs'), namely Adaptation (A), Goal Attainment (G), Integration (I), and Pattern Maintenance, or, as Parsons later renamed it, Latent Pattern Maintenance—Tension Management, or simply, Latency (L). Parsons pictures society (or the social system) as a large square, which he divides into four equal parts. These parts are the four functional problems, represented by the acronym, AGIL (see Diagram 1). The underlying idea is that all systems need to accomplish these four functions in order to survive. The meaning of these four 'functional imperatives' is as follows:

1) Adaptation: By this is meant the problem of securing sufficient resources from the society's *external* environment and distributing them throughout the system. Each society needs certain institutions that perform the function of adaptation to the environment - which is an *external* function. Adaptation provides the *means* — the *instrumental* aspects — to achieve goals. Biological organism performs the function of adaptation in the general system of action. In the context of society, economic institution performs this function.

2) Goal Attainment: This function is concerned with the need of the system to mobilize its resources to attain the goals and to establish priorities among them. It mobilizes motivations of the actors and organises their

efforts. In the general system of action, personality performs this function, while in case of society this task is given to the political institution, because power is essential for implementation and decision-making. Goal attainment is concerned with *ends* — the *consummatory* aspects. Since goals are delineated in relation with the external environment, it is, like adaptation, an *external* function.

3) Integration: It is regarded as the 'heart' of the four-function paradigm (Wallace and Wolf 1980: 36). By integration is meant the need to coordinate, adjust, and regulate relationships among various actors (or, the units of the system, such as the institutions), so that the system is an 'ongoing entity'. According to the general theory of action, the social system performs this function, whereas in society, legal institutions and courts are entrusted with this task. Integration is concerned with *ends*, and the *internal* aspects of the system.

4) Latency (Pattern Maintenance and Tension Management): This function pertains to the issues of providing knowledge and information to the system. In the general theory of action, culture — the repository of knowledge and information — accomplishes this function. Culture does not *act* because it does not have energy. It lays hidden, supplying actors (who are high in energy) with knowledge and information they require for carrying out action. Because culture exists 'behind' the actions of people, it is called 'latent'. Integration takes care of two things: first, it motivates actors to play their roles in the system and maintain the value patterns; and second, to provide mechanisms for managing internal tensions between different parts and actors. The problem that every society faces is of keeping its value system intact and ensuring that the members conform to the rules. It will be possible when societal values are properly transmitted and imbibed. The institutions that carry out this function are family, religion, and education. Latency gives *means* to achieve ends; it is *internal* to the system.

AGIL Model

	Means (Instrumental)	Ends (Consummatory)	
External **A**	Adaptation	Goal attainment	**G**
Internal **L**	Latency (pattern maintenance and tension-relieving mechanisms)	Integration	**I**

General Level of Action Theory	
Organism	Personality
Culture	Social System

AGIL Functions in the Social System	
Economy	Polity
Fiduciary System	Societal Community

Fig. 1

With this four-function paradigm in mind, Parsons (1973) jointly carried out (with Gerald Platt) a study of higher education in America, by conducting a survey of members of American colleges and universities. An important conclusion of this study was that American universities and colleges specialise in furthering the rational (or 'scientific') approach to knowledge. The central shared value within the American system of higher education is of cognitive rationality. This value is of paramount significance to contemporary American society. The American system of higher education, therefore, transmits and maintains values central to its society (of which it is a part), thus performing the function of pattern maintenance.

For the purpose of analysis, Parsons identifies sub-systems corresponding to the AGIL model in all systems and their sub-systems (see Diagram 1). As we have seen, at the general level of action theory, the biological organism performs the function of adaptation, the personality system, the function of goal attainment, the social system integrates different units, and the cultural system is concerned with pattern maintenance. Then, the social system is broken down into the four AGIL functions. We noted earlier that economy performs the function of adaptation, whereas, polity (or political institution), the function of goal attainment. For the sub-system that carries out the function of integration, Parsons uses the term 'societal community', which reminds one of Ferdinand Tönnies's ideas of *gemeinschaft* ('community'). 'Societal community' produces solidarity, unity, cohesiveness, and loyalty to norms, values, and institutions. The function of pattern maintenance, Parsons says, is the task of what he calls the 'fiduciary system', which pertains to the nature of a trust or a trusteeship. This system produces and legitimizes moral values, beliefs, and expressive symbols.

Each of the sub-systems of the system can be taken up for analysis by treating it as a 'system', and then, breaking it down into four parts looking for its components that respectively perform the functions of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. This way of analyzing society is known as the systemic approach.

6.6   Conclusion

Parsons's AGIL model is an ideal type, applicable more to differentiated societies than simple societies. In the latter case, institutions may collapse into one, with the result that the same institution may perform different functions. The example of family may be cited here, which carries out economic, political, and religious functions, in addition to the functions traditionally assigned to it, like socialization of the young. In communist societies, the party may decide the aspects of economy – the processes of production and distribution – and thus, adaptation and goal attainment may appear indistinguishable.

Parsons' theory is popularly known as a 'grand theory' – an all-encompassing, unified theory – which is believed to have a large explanatory power. However, Parsons' student, Robert Merton, is skeptical of such a theory, for it is too general to be of much use (Merton 1957). Instead, he expresses his preference for mid-level (middle-range) theories, which cover certain delimited aspects of social phenomena (such as groups, social mobility, or role conflict). Partially because of this middle-range strategy, Merton's functionalism is quite different from that of Parsons.

For instance, Merton abandons the search for any functional prerequisites that will be valid in all social systems. He also rejects the idea of the earlier functionalists that recurrent social phenomena should be explained in terms of their benefits to society as a whole. For criticism, Merton identifies the three postulates of earlier functionalists given below:

1) Postulate of the functional unity of society. It is an assumption that there is unity in society, which comes about because of the contributions that parts make to the whole.

2) Postulate of the universal functionalism. It is an assumption that all social or cultural forms have positive functions, which are for the maintenance and well being of society.

3) Postulate of indispensability. It is an assumption that the function that a social or cultural form performs is an indispensable precondition for the survival of society.

Merton notes that none of these postulates are empirically justifiable. For instance, there is no reason to suppose that particular institutions are the only ones to fulfill the functions. Empirical research shows that there may be a wide range of what Merton has termed 'functional alternatives' that may be able to perform the same function.

With a critical look, Merton tries to attempt what he calls a 'codification of functional analysis in sociology', a functional paradigm (or perspective) (which is not a grand theory) that takes into consideration the actual dimensions of social reality, of conformity and deviance, understanding and explaining them. Like other functionalists, he views society as a system of interconnected parts, where the functioning of a part has implications for the functioning of other parts and the entire system. Like his predecessors, he is interested in the concepts of equilibrium and integration, and the contribution of customs and institutions to the persistence of societies. His definition of function is also in terms of the 'positive contribution' of a part to the whole: functions are those contributions or consequences that 'make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system.' For the working of society and its institutions, it is important that all share a set of common values and norms, which is another distinguishing property of functionalism.

While agreeing with other functionalists on certain points stated above, Merton has made a distinct contribution to a set of two typologies, namely, the distinction between 'function' and 'dysfunction', and between 'manifest' and 'latent' functions. Most functionalists think that all contributions are inherently good or 'functional' for society, a proposition Merton finds difficult to accept. He thinks there are acts that have 'consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system'. Such acts have harmful consequences, the technical term for which is 'dysfunction'. It is, therefore, expected that the sociologist will always ask the following question: 'For whom are the consequences functional or dysfunctional?' The same institution can be functional in one context and dysfunctional in another. All social institutions are expected to have some mix of functions and dysfunctions. Whether the institution tilts to the pole of function or dysfunction in a continuum will depend upon the net balance between the functional and dysfunctional consequences.

> **Box 6.2: Manifest and Latent Function**
>
> The distinction between manifest and latent functions has its roots in the writings of the founders in sociology. In his study of religion, for example, Durkheim (1915) makes a distinction between 'what people do of which they are aware' and 'what emerges from their collective acts which they had not intended and anticipated.' When people assemble for collective totemic rituals, their explicit aim is to honour their totem, but what these rituals produce is a sense of we-ness, which is an unintended, unrecognised, and unanticipated consequence. Following this, one can say that manifest functions are those consequences people observe or expect, while latent functions are those consequences that are neither recognised nor intended.

Merton was able to advance four types of explanations in terms of the two dichotomies (function and dysfunction; manifest and latent functions). The earlier functionalists put forth only one explanation and that too with respect to latent functions. Merton's conceptual scheme guided empirical research, rather than remaining a theory with several explanatory claims, like the 'grand theory' of Parsons.

6.7 Further Reading

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Structure, Function and Neo-Functionalism

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to

- explain the major criticism of functionalism that led to they rise of neo-functionalism

- discuss the premises and basic of orientations of neo-functionalism

- critically evaluate the merits and demerits of neo-functionalism.

7.1   Introduction

Without exaggeration, one may say that in the history of social anthropology and sociology, no theory has generated so much of interest, enthusiasm, and response as did functionalism. Known by different names (such as 'functional approach', 'structural-functional approach', 'structural-functionalism', 'Functional School', etc.), functionalism emerged as some kind of a unified methodology and theory in the 1930s. Earlier, right from the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was a body of scattered ideas and propositions. Until the 1960s, its reputation was unassailable, as its adherents were scholars of outstanding merit, who were known (and are still known) for various other contributions besides developing it both in terms of theory and method. For example, the famous American functionalist, Talcott Parsons, is well known for his contribution to family sociology, the school as a social system, role analysis in medical institutions, professions and problems of the blacks, evolutionism, etc. Similarly, Robert Merton's contribution to social structure and anomie, deviance and conformity, dysfunctions of bureaucracy, sociology of science, survey methods, role-set, etc, will always be referred.

During this period from the 1930s to the 1960s, when functional approach was virtually unchallenged in the United States of America and the other parts of the world, some of its criticisms were undoubtedly surfacing. For instance, the British social anthropologist, Sir E.E. Evans-Pritchard, rejected the idea of social anthropology as a science (held by the protagonist of the structural-functional approach, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown) and viewed it rather as a 'comparative history'. Although Evans-Pritchard began as a functionalist, he transformed into a humanist. Sir Edmund R. Leach also started his career in social anthropology as a functionalist, he then moved to the 'processual analysis', i.e., looking at society as a 'process in time', as it is evident from his 1954 book on political systems. Later, under the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss, he became a structuralist, and came to be known as a neostructuralist (Kuper 1973). His 1961 publication of *Rethinking Anthropology* offered a challenge to structural-functionalism. In spite of these criticisms, functionalism continued to survive with glory.

But by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the criticisms of the functional theory increased manifold. Parsons's attempts to merge theories based on action with those based on structures were unconvincing to many critics. The rehabilitation of Marxian approach in sociology and the successful emergence of the conflict theory was a big blow to functionalism. Several new theories and approaches, each trying to bring in the aspects that functionalism had ignored, became the focal points. It seemed clear to many critics that sociology had entered a post-functional, a post-Parsonian phase in its development.

Gradually, after a brief hiatus, during the 1980s, there was a revival of interest in Parsons's work – some call it a phase of a 'rediscovery' of Parsons. Initially, it had little to do with structural-functionalism, but with Parsons's ability to synthesize the works of the classical thinkers (such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto) to explore a theory of social action in his *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), which he ably used to advance fields like economy and society, family and industrialisation, etc. Following this was a resurgence of interest in Parsons's functionalism, first in Germany and then, America. In 1985, Jeffrey C. Alexander introduced the term 'neofunctionalism' with an aim to reconsider and revise Parsons's theory. Neo-functionalism offered a critique of the fundamental propositions of the original theory of functionalism. It examined the aspects of several other theories – some of which had conflicting relations with functionalism, for example, Marxism – in order to integrate them with neofunctionalism. Because of this, neo-functionalism does not manifest itself in one single theory, rather as several variants put together under the same rubric. Against this background, Alexander (1985) emphasizes that neofunctionalism should be considered to a lesser extent as a theory and more as a 'wide-ranging *intellectual tendency* or *movement*'.

This unit centers around the critical evolution of functionalism and the emergence of neo-functionalism. We will explore the concept of neo-functionalism is n sociological writings and examine its merits and limitation.

7.2 Criticisms of Functionalism

One of the main criticisms of functionalism is that it does not adequately deal with history. In other words, it is inherently *ahistorical* (but not anti-historical). It does not deal with the questions of past and history, although the advocates of functionalism have considered evolution and diffusion as important processes of change. Functionalism in social anthropology in the 1930s emerged as a reaction to the nineteenth century 'pseudo-historical' and 'speculative' evolutionism and diffusionism. It also tried to overcome the ethnocentric biases of the earlier approaches, which regarded the contemporary pre-literate societies, popularly known as 'primitive societies', and certain customs and practices found among them as remnants of past. Edward Tylor unhesitatingly regarded the 'contemporary primitives' as 'social fossils' and 'survivals' of the past, assuming that their study would guide us to an understanding of the cultural traits of the societies of prehistoric times (Harris 1968: 164-5). This would help us in reconstructing the history of humankind.

Closely related with this is another criticism of functionalism: it does not effectively deal with the contemporary processes of social change. Thus, in essence, because it is neither able to study the pasts of societies nor the

contemporary change process, it is more suited to the study of 'contemporary static structures', if there are any. Or, perhaps, it portrays the societies it studies as if they are static, which, in reality, may not be so. The picture of a society that functionalists present is like the picture of a 'frozen river' that tells nothing about its ebb and flow. By analogy, functionalists 'freeze society' in the same manner as a still camera 'freezes' people and locations in its frame.

There are two views on this issue. First, the problem is believed to lie with the theory of functionalism, because when the parts of a society are seen as reinforcing one another as well as the system, when each part fits well with the other parts, then it is difficult to explain how these parts can contribute to change (Cohen 1968). Or, why should the parts change or contribute to change when they are all in a state of harmony? The second opinion is that there is nothing in functionalism which prevents it from dealing with the issues of history and change. For instance, Parsons's 1966 book titled *Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* reflects the ability of structural-functionalism to handle the dimensions of change. So does Smelser's work of 1959 on industrial revolution. The problem lies, according to some, not with the theory of functionalism, but its practitioners, who rarely address the issues of change and even when they do, it is in developmental and adaptive terms than in revolutionary (Turner and Maryanski 1979). Whether the problem of functionalism has to do with the theory or its practitioners, 'the fact remains that the main contributions of structural functionalists lie with the study of static, not changing, social structures' (Ritzer 2000: 115).

Another criticism of functionalism is that it is unable to deal effectively with conflict. Functionalists have overemphasized harmonious relationships. They tend to exaggerate consensus, stability, equilibrium, and integration, disregarding the forces of conflict and disorder, and changes emerging from them. For them, conflict is necessarily destructive and occurs outside the framework of society. One may remember here Durkheim who regarded 'anomie' (the state of normlessness) as a 'social sickness'. Both Comte and later, Durkheim were staunchly critical of the Marxist and socialist thoughts, for they believed that the need of that time (when they were writing) was social reconstruction and order. Society had already become quite disintegrated, Comte said, because of the French Revolution and any support rendered to the idea of revolution would further accentuate disorder. Thus Comte's positivism and Durkheim's 'functional explanations' paid scant attention to the issues of conflict.

Box 7.1: Early Twentieth Century Functionalism

The early twentieth-century anthropological functionalism certainly inherited the legacy of the past, the theory of social order, but there was another reason why it consistently ignored the aspects of conflict and change. It received its empirical substantiation not from philosophical premises (as it did in case of Comte) or from secondary data (as was the case with Durkheim), but from first-hand, observation-based studies of simple societies, like that of Andamanese or Trobriand Islanders. The societies the anthropologists studied were largely cut off from the outside world. By comparison to other societies of the world, a higher degree of normative consensus prevailed among them because they were largely homogeneous. They had by and large *one* culture. Social sanctions were undisputed among them, contra-normative

actions were negligible, conformity to rules and tradition was higher and valued, and relatively speaking, the extent and magnitude of change was definitely less. It however did not mean that they were 'changeless', but they were changing slowly, at a snail's speed.

In the words of Robert Redfield (1955), these societies were 'past-oriented' in comparison to modern societies which were 'future-oriented'. The 'past-oriented' societies were proud of their tradition, which for them was sacrosanct; they wanted to keep it intact and therefore, any attempt to assail it was strongly dealt with. The 'future-oriented' societies were not satisfied with their lot; they looked forward to changing their lifestyles, technology, and norms and values. Since the substantiation of anthropological functionalism came from the empirical study of 'past-oriented', technologically simpler, pre-literate, and non-civilized societies, it was obvious that the characteristics of these societies would find their conspicuous presence in the theory.

Because functionalism does not deal with the issues of conflict, disorder, and change, many critics note that it has a conservative bias. In his critical assessment of functionalism, Gouldner (1970) says that for Parsons, one of the leading functionalists, a 'partly filled glass' is 'half full' rather than 'half empty'. The point here is that for those the 'glass is half full' are emphasising the positive aspects of a situation in comparison to those who lay emphasis on the negative side, seeing the 'glass as half empty'. The conservative bias in functionalism is not only because of what it ignores (history, change, conflict, disorder) but also what it emphasises (society 'here and now', norms and values, consensus, order). Functionalists are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the normative order of society.

The individual in functionalism is devoid of dynamism and creativity. He is simply a product of society and its forces constrain him at every juncture. The opposite view is that it is the individual who in fact initiates change in society. Individuals as much use the system as the system uses them. Those who subscribe to the interactional approach argue that functionalism has failed to conceptualise adequately the complex nature of actors and the process of interaction. One of the reasons of why functionalism ignored the role of the individual in society was that it was solely interested in explaining the survival of society. It was interested in the 'collectivity' and not the 'individual', and even when it was interested in the individual, as was the case with Malinowski, it was only till the point of the satisfaction of its biological needs. It was not to look at and analyze the attitudes and sentiments of the individual, and the role these psychic dimensions play in initiating social changes.

The functionalists's search for order led them to lend justification to the existing norms and values, ideological and hierarchical structures, institutions, and rules of power distribution prevalent in a society. They did not realize, as Marxists had done, that the normative system in a society was a creation of the ruling elite, and there may be several opposing forces to it. By looking for order, they in fact were justifying the system, the established order, and thus were helping in the maintenance of the status quo. Functionalism was charged for supporting the dominant elite and the system as it was.

In addition to these, there were some important methodological and logical criticisms of functionalism. The belief of functionalism that there is a 'single theory' that could be used in all situations was an illusion. Many scholars found that it was difficult to apply functionalism to complex societies, which were not only fast changing but were also conflict-ridden. The ideas of relativism – i.e., things are meaningful in their respective cultural contexts — to which functionalists gave support, made a comparative analysis difficult. If 'things' can only be understood in the context of the social system of which they are a part, then how can we compare it with similar 'things' in other systems? If polyandry, for example, makes sense in the context of the community of the Todas, how can we compare it to polyandry in Jaunsar-Bawar? Some scholars have tried to deal with this matter of the lack of comparability in functionalism. Walter Goldschmidt (1966) has argued in favour of an approach he has called 'comparative functionalism'. According to this approach, there is a universality of functions to which institutions are a response. All cultures require the same functions; however the institutions that fulfill these functions vary from one society to another.

One of the important criticisms of functionalism is that it is inherently teleological, i.e., explanations are given in terms of 'purposes' or 'goals'. With respect to this, Turner and Maryanski (1979) submit that teleology *per se* is not a problem. As a matter of fact, social theory should take into account the 'teleological relationship between society and its component parts' (Ritzer 2000). The problem comes when teleology is stretched to unacceptable limits, when it is believed that only the given and specific part of society can fulfill the needs. Teleology becomes illegitimate when it fails to take into consideration the idea that a variety of alternative structures can fulfill the same needs. Why certain structures come up and why certain structures become irreplaceable needs to be explained. The later functionalists — such as Parsons and Merton — were aware of this problem and in their own ways tried to overcome it. Merton, for example, proposed the concept of functional alternatives. In his analysis of the family system, Parsons was able to show that in the contemporary industrial society, nuclear family performed the functions of primary socialisation and the stabilization of adult personality and no other institution could carry them out. These functions were non-transferable to any other institutions.

Functionalism has also been criticised for making explicit what is implicit in the premise; the technical term used for this kind of reasoning is 'tautology'. For example, if religion exists, it must be functional, otherwise, it will cease to exist, and its function must be to contribute to social solidarity, because without it, society will not be able to survive. Many critics have pointed out that functionalism suffers from 'globular or circular reasoning'. Needs are postulated on the basis of the existing institutions, that are, in turn, used to explain their existence. For instance, society as a 'social fact' explains the division of labour, and in turn, division of labour contributes to the maintenance of solidarity in society. What is happening here is that the whole is being defined in terms of its parts and then, parts are being defined in terms of the whole. Because one is being defined in terms of the other, in fact, none of them – neither the whole nor its parts – is actually being defined. As we noted earlier, here also there is a debate whether tautology is inherent in the theory or has come into existence because of the deeds of its practitioners.

7.3 The Thesis of Neo-functionalism

A revival of interest in Parsons's work, first in Germany and then, the United States of America, led to the emergence of neo-functionalism. The basic aim has been to merge certain aspects of functionalism, those which have withstood the test of time, with other paradigms that have better developed critical perspectives. The aim has been to build a 'hybrid' that combines the strong points of the other perspectives so that one can deal with the so-called opposite issues (such as, consensus and conflict, equilibrium and change, collectivity and individual) in a balanced manner.

a) Revival in Germany

Those associated with neo-functionalism in Germany are Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas, who initially collaborated on a theory of social engineering in modern society, but later worked separately. Although formally trained in law, Luhmann has been a student of sociology and in 1960, spent a year at Harvard where he had a chance to be in contact with Parsons. He developed a sociological approach that combined certain aspects from Parsons' structural functionalism with general systems theory. He also introduced in it concepts from cognitive biology and cybernetics (Ritzer 2000: 185). However, he disagreed with Parsons about the options available to individuals as concrete human beings. Parsons placed emphasis on value consensus, also believing that because the social system penetrates the personality system, the options available to the individual for social relationships and behaviour are limited. But that is, Luhmann thinks, not simply correct. He moves the individual out of the social system into the 'society' — what may be termed the 'societal environment' — which is far more complex and less restrictive. It accords people more freedom, especially freedom for carrying out 'irrational and immoral behaviour' (Abrahamson 2001: 148).

Abrahamson (2001: 148) says that if Luhmann moved *from* Parsons, and then discovered the problems with the concept of value consensus, Habermas *moved* toward Parsons. Habermas's early writings were strongly critical of Parsons, but later, he accorded a place to cultural, social, and personality systems in his theory. His conceptualisation of the relationship between these systems was quite consistent with Parsons's views. He also gave place to Parsons's concept of 'self-regulating system', which comes into existence when societies become complex as a consequence of which structural systems are separated from 'lifeworld', i.e., the inter-subjective realm for experiencing and communicating about culture, society, and personality.

b) Revival in the United States of America

The main spokespersons of neofunctionalism in America are Jeffrey Alexander and Paul Colomy. In one of their joint publications of 1985, they define neofunctionalism as 'a self-critical strand of functional theory that seeks to broaden functionalism's intellectual scope while retaining its theoretical core' (p. 118). Under the rubric of 'neo-functionalism', they have made an effort to extend structural functionalism by overcoming its difficulties. Structural functionalism envisions a single, all embracing conceptual scheme that is

supposed to be applicable for all societies at all points of time. By comparison, neofunctionalism is a 'loosely organised package' built around a general logic. It possesses a number of autonomous 'proliferations' and 'variations', which work at different levels and in different empirical contexts (Alexander and Colomy, eds., 1990).

The goal of neo-functionalists is to create a more synthetic theory. There is no doubt that Parsons was an unparalleled synthesizer of grand theory and structural functionalism has a strong synthetic core from the beginning. In his variety of structural functionalism, Parsons tried to integrate a wide range of theoretical inputs. He was also interested in drawing an interrelationship between different systems that constitute the social world — such as, cultural, social, and personality systems. So, Alexander and Colomy say, the beginning of structural functionalism was quite promising, but gradually, Parsons's approach became overly narrow and deterministic. He started viewing the cultural system as determining the other systems. Also, his overwhelming preoccupation with the 'problem of order' led to insufficient attention being paid to conflict and strain.

Alexander and Colomy think that the deficiencies of structural functionalism are not irreversible. Its synthetic orientation can be recaptured. The concepts of conflict and subjective meaning can be introduced. One can regard the integration of the system and the interpenetration of its various subsystems as a 'tendency', to be investigated rather than as a 'given' or 'assumed' fact.

Box 7.2: Neo-Functionalism: Problems that need to be Surmounted

In neo-functionalism, the problems that need to be surmounted are:

1) Anti-individualism — the individual in structural functionalism is passive and lacks creativity, and is simply a product of the social forces, which he neither checks nor controls;

2) Antagonism to change — structural functionalism is a theory of social order rather than of change;

3) Conservatism — structural functionalism has worked toward offering a justification of the system and its practices, often justifying inequality, exploitation, and oppression.

4) Idealism — structural functionalism speaks in terms of an ideal society, where everything is in order and stability.

5) Anti-empiricist bias — structural functionalism is more concerned with abstract social systems instead of real societies.

Neo-functionalism can be seen as an 'effort' or 'tendency' to overcome these problems. Alexander was skeptical of calling this a developed theory and more an orientation sensitive to the criticisms of structural functionalism.

The basic orientations of neofunctionalism may be outlined. Neofunctionalism operates with a descriptive model of society. For it, society comprises elements that are constantly in interaction with other elements, and together they form a pattern. Because of this pattern, society is differentiated from its environment, with which it has its ceaseless interaction. Parts of a system are symbiotically connected – one contributing to the other. However, there is no overarching force that determines their interaction. Neofunctionalism rejects any monocausal determinism; it is open-ended and pluralistic.

Neo-functionalism allocates equal attention to action and order. According to Alexander (1982: 65), these concepts constitute the 'true presuppositions of sociological debate.' Structural functionalism has a tendency to focus almost exclusively on the macro-level sources of order in social structures and culture. It gives little attention to micro-level actions — actions that take place at the local level. In its analysis, neo-functionalism includes rational as well as expressive actions. It is far from viewing that human actions are only rational, gain-multiplying, profit-oriented, and 'scientific'. One of the main functions of culture is that it allows people to express themselves, sometimes aesthetically.

Like structural functionalism, neo-functionalism retains interest in integration, but it is not an accomplished fact. Rather, it is a social possibility. It recognises that deviance is a ubiquitous social reality, and to check it, each system must have the instruments of social control, forcing the deviants to subscribe to rules lest punishments to their actions become cumulatively stringent. Social control tries to restore some sort of stability in the system. Neo-functionalism is concerned with equilibrium, but it is broader than the concern of structural functionalism. Neo-functionalism does not believe that any system can ever be in a state of 'static equilibrium'; it is always moving and partial. Moreover, the concept of equilibrium is to be regarded as a reference point for functional analysis. It does not describe the lives of individuals in actual social systems, which is perennially in action. It brings us once again to the point about neofunctionalism mentioned earlier – it is concerned equally with order and action.

Of all the functionalists, it was Parsons's structural functionalism that exercised the maximum impact on later scholars, some of whom later became famous as neo-functionalists. The latter accept the traditional Parsonian emphasis on culture, social, and personality systems, which are vital to any society. These systems interpenetrate one another, because of which they produce tension, which is one of the important sources of change and control. Further, change occurs when cultural, social, and personality systems are differentiated over time. This change does not occur because of conformity and harmony, but because of the rise of individualism and institutional strains.

Reflection and Action 7.2

What are the major similarities and differences between structural functionalism and neo-functionalism?

Neo-functionalism submits that in order to enrich our understanding of the processes of order and action in society, we should think of borrowing from other theories and perspectives in sociology and other social sciences. Alexander and Colomy have tried synthesizing structural functionalism with other theoretical traditions. To overcome the idealist bias in structural functionalism, neo-functionalism encourages materialist approaches. To counter the structural functional tendency to emphasize order has led neo-functionalists to explore the theories of culture. Insights from approaches such as exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, and phenomenology are being drawn to compensate for macro-level biases of the traditional functional approach.

The future of neo-functionalism has been cast into doubt by the fact that Alexander in his book *Neofunctionalism and After* (1998) has stated that he

has outgrown a neo-functionalist orientation in his career. He says that one of his important goals was to show the importance of Parsons' theory. Parsons had built a theoretical scheme that was potentially capable of overcoming the contradictions inherent in classical sociology, but neither he nor any of his collaborators and students was able to take full advantage of the theory. Alexander saw his aim as that of developing the theoretical strands that lay incipient in Parsons's work. Since he thinks that he has succeeded in this venture, his project of neo-functionalism is over. It will however, Alexander says, keep on influencing his later thoughts, and his present work on civil societies.

7.4 Merits and Demerits of Neo-functionalism: Conclusion

Although some of the traits of what has come to be called 'neo-functionalism' are found in the German interest in Parsons's works, this theoretical 'tendency' is principally associated with an American sociologist, Jeffrey C. Alexander, and later, his younger collaborator, Paul Colomy. A restricted use of the term 'neo-functionalism' is also found in ecological studies where it basically means assigning primary importance to techno-environmental forces in an analysis of the processes of cultural adaptation (Bettinger 1996).

Alexander does not seem to be happy with the use of the term 'neo-functionalism'. He also thinks that 'functionalism' was not really an appropriate term to describe Parsons's approach. Parsons himself tried to discard the term 'structural functionalism' for his approach, but he knew that it would continue to be used for his sociology. Some of his associates preferred to call his theory 'action theory'. Alexander (1985) also thinks that notwithstanding the inappropriateness of the term 'functionalism', Parsons's sociology will be known in future by this name. Thus, not much will be gained by discarding the term; rather one should cling to it, and redefine it. Instead of being a unified theory, neofunctionalism is a 'tendency', characterised by the following propositions (Alexander 1985: 10):

1) An open and pluralistic description of society as a whole.

2) An even-handed apportionment when it comes to action vs. structure (or action vs. order).

3) Integration is viewed as a possibility; deviance and social control are considered realities.

4) Discernment between personality, culture, and society.

5) Differentiation is viewed as the central driving force producing social change.

6) The development of concepts and theory is considered to be independent of all the levels involved in sociologic analysis.

There have been marked variations in the responses to the efforts of Alexander and others to revive functionalism. Some have found Alexander's account of the functional tradition as extremely vague. They also question the purported continuity between functionalism and neo-functionalism, because 'neo-functionalism seems to include everything functionalism has been criticized as lacking' (Fauske 2000:245). There are limits to the length to which any theoretical perspective can go in accommodating incompatible notions and yet retain its name and lineage. For some critics, the changes introduced in structural functionalism are more cosmetic than real. Neo-functionalism is

still imbued with the features that distinguish functionalism. For instance, the view that societies can be studied objectively continues to predominate. Individuals are still regarded as 'reactors to the system' rather than 'dynamic and creative actors'. Conflict is recognised but remains at a secondary place in the theory (Abrahamson 2001). And, revolution is certainly not considered. So, isn't neofunctionalism old wine in new bottles?

Alexander suggests that sociology should be based on a post-positivistic understanding of science, which means that we can understand the world around us as much through theoretical explanations as through empirical enquiry. This view opposes positivism because it reduces theory to empirical data; in other words, for it, there cannot be a theory divorced from empirical facts. Positivism makes a sharp distinction between empirical observations and non-empirical propositions. The latter constitute the realm of philosophy and metaphysics, thus deserving no place in empirical science.

Post-positivism submits that a theory can be discussed, examined, verified, and elaborated with reference to other theories rather than empirical research. In other words, the referent for a theory might be another theory rather than an ensemble of facts. Theories are viewed as if they represent the 'empirical observations'. Alexander is critical of empirically-based inferences in social sciences. One of the fundamental differences between social sciences and natural sciences is that theoretical perspectives always permeate every work that social scientists do. Sociological theory, therefore, can be scientifically significant irrespective of its ability and capacity to explain empirical observations.

In future, Alexander thinks, there will be a 'grand theory', built on the premises of post-positivism. This theory will be multidimensional with respect to various polarities in classical sociological theory, such as micro-macro, order-conflict, equilibrium-stability, structure-agency, etc. But even after its 'hybridization', drawing upon different theoretical perspectives, neo-functionalism will not be a 'distinct paradigm', much less a grand theory. In other words, skepticism prevails about the future of neofunctionalism.

7.5   Further Reading

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Unit 8
The Conceptual and Theoretical Issues of Power

Contents

Learning Objectives

After going through this Unit, you will be able to

▢   understand the meaning and concept of power

▢   explain the articulation of power among the elite and in local communities

▢   critically discuss the works of major thinkers on power

8.1   Introduction

In simple terms power refers to the ability of a person to influence the behaviour of another person or a group of persons in accordance with his / her own wish. In the words of Tawney (1931: 229), "Power may be defined as the capacity of an individual, or group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in a manner in which he desires, and to prevent his conduct being modified in the manner in which he does not". Power heralds a relationship of subordination and superordination between people. Many social scientists, particularly sociologists, are chiefly interested in the consequences of the play of power in social relationships.   In this Unit, we begin with the meaning and concept of power and go on to the major theoretical approaches to the understanding of power in sociological writings.   Here, we briefly review the viewpoints of six sociologists who explain the different dimensions of power. Later in the Unit, we discuss the articulation of power in two mutually opposed contexts: the elite on the one hand and the local communities on the other.

8.2   Concept of Power

Power always entails a social relationship between at least two actors. It cannot be an attribute of one person. To say that an individual has power is meaningless unless it is stated over whom this power is exercised. An individual or group of individuals who hold power is / are able to get others to do what they want them to do. If those on whom the power is exercised resist or refuse to obey those who are powerful, they are punished in one way or the other. Power always gives rise to asymmetry in relationships. Those who have greater access to limited resources e.g., control over finances, ownership or control over means of production and / or means of distribution are more powerful than those who do not have the means or

the opportunity to control such resources. The use of sanction in imposing one's will is an important constituent of power and it is on this count that power differs from influence.

Coser (1982), delineated two major traditions in the conceptualisation of power that can be distinguished in sociological writings. The first one focuses on power as the imposition of the will of actor A (who may be an individual or a collectivity) upon actor B despite B's resistance. Here, actor B is dominated by actor A. This approach may be traced in Max Weber. The second tradition focuses on power as a resource at the disposal of collectivities and used for their benefits allowing them to make use of it to attain their objectives. Here power is conceptualised as a collective facility. This approach may be traced to Talcott Parsons.

Two questions assume relevance at this stage, why do some people weild power while others do not? Why do some people command and others obey? At the outset one tends to think in terms of physical might and strength. The stronger person wields power and commands while the weak person does not wield power and obeys. This, however, does not hold true always. It may be said that inequality of resources leads to inequality of power, so if the resources within a specific sphere were equally balanced, there would be no power relation between two parties.

The answer to the twin questions is far more complex. It is important to know the basis on which the one who holds power claims obedience and the obedient one feels obliged to obey. Gerth and Mills (1953) explain that in itself power is simply the probability that one person will act as another person wishes. The obedience may rest upon fear, rational calculations of advantage, lack of energy to do otherwise, loyalty, or any other reason.

Dennis Wrong (1968: 679) comprehensively explains, "*If* an actor is believed to be powerful, *if* he knows that others hold such a belief, and *if* he encourages it and resolves to make use of it by intervening in or punishing actions by others who do not comply with his wishes, *then* he truly has power and this power has indeed been conferred upon him by the attributions, perhaps initially without foundation, of others". A group, which is unorganised, lacks common goals or common interests, and is not ready to exercise power, is not treated as powerful. Often people who are in power are able to avoid the surfacing of issues that are of significance to the powerless. They are able to keep at bay the complain of the powerless people that they are not cared for.

At this stage it is important to distinguish power from related concepts:

a) **Power and Authority**

When power acquires legitimacy or justification it is understood as authority. It may be noted that authority receives voluntary obedience. A person who has authority may exercise command or control over other persons. Take the example of a senior bureaucrat who assigns tasks to his/her subordinates and may even transfer some of them to another city. This is because, the bureaucrat has the authority to do it by virtue of his/her position and status in the government machinery. In formal organisations authority is clearly specified, and dispensed through rules and laws, of the organisations. It may be understood at this stage that the exercise of authority does not necessarily imply the superiority of the person who commands. A teacher may be a

better scholar than the Principal of the school who dismisses him/her. It is simply because of the authority, which vests with the Principal that he/she may suspend a teacher. Power may, therefore, be executed in formal organisations as institutionalised authority and as institutionalised power in informal organisations.

b) Power and Prestige

E.A. Ross (1916) drew attention to prestige as the immediate cause of the location of power. It was said that the class which has more prestige will have most power. Prestige, therefore, is an important source of power. It is not appropriate to associate prestige with power because prestige is usually not accompanied with power. In itself power becomes the basis of prestige i.e., when a person has power, he / she has prestige but when a person has prestige he / she may not have power.

c) Power and Influence

There is a close connection between power and influence. Power commands obedience and submission; influence is persuasive rather than coercive. Power calls for intended control, which is usually executed through sanctions while influence does not involve the use of sanctions or punishment. Influence, is not essentially accompanied with power. Newton, for example was a man of influence but not power. A policeman may have power but not influence. In the same vein, the Prime Minister of the country is a person with both power and influence.

d) Power and Dominance

Power exists and expresses itself in inter-group relations. It is associated with status that people occupy in formal organisations while dominance is associated with one's personality and may be treated as a psychological concept. Power, on the other hand, is associated with the structure of society itself and may be treated as a sociological concept (Bierstedt, 1982).

8.3 Theoretical Considerations

The major theoretical considerations in the context of power focus on (i) its potential to achieve goals, (here power is treated as equivalent to domination enfolding the strategy of exercising power over someone) and (ii) its potential to generate solidarity and collective autonomy (here power is understood in the larger framework of pursuing collective action as enfolded in the strategy of exercising power to achieve common goals). Against this backdrop, the major currents in the sociological conception of power are discussed here.

a) Max Weber: Power and Domination

According to Weber (1914, 1920) 'power' (*macht*) as a general concept is distinct from 'domination' (*herrschaft*) as a specific phenomenon. Power is defined as an actor's chance to impose his/her will on another (even against the resistance of the latter) in social relationship. What is interesting to note is the proposition that the degree of power is dependent on the nature of submission over the one on whom it is being exercised. Stated simply, power is more if the probability of submission to the will of the one who holds it is higher. It may be safely said that the power of an individual(s) is measured in terms of the chance(s) of imposing the will. Here, the basis of power or the basis on which imposition of will is called for is not important.

Scott (1996:22) explains that power is a potential that is realised through the actions in which an actor engages. This potential is determined by accidental or fortuitous circumstances (eg. individual has power over others because of better physique or because he/she has information that is not available to others) as much as by structurally defined opportunities and capacities (e.g. when social distribution of resources improves or worsens the chances of realising his or her will) at the disposal of an individual. Domination or *herrschaft,* on the other hand, presumes the presence of a *herr* or master. The chief difference between power and domination is that the former does not imply the right to command and the duty to obey while the latter implies the probability of gaining willing obedience.

There are two contrasting types of domination. The first kind of domination is one that involves a rational and calculative maneuvering of interests in one's favour. Often the individual who exercises domination of this kind is able to convince the subordinate actors that it is their interest which is being served by allowing him/her do what he/she is doing. This often happens when small companies sell their goods to a monopoly retail outlet. In doing so they subject themselves to the power of the retailer since their livelihood depends on his/her goodwill. The second type of domination is the one which is exercised by virtue of authority. Here, domination is exercised by an individual or group because it is legitimised as authority. Those on whom domination is exercised accept the commands and demands of those who dominate as basis of their own behaviour.

Box 8.1: Power and Domination

'Weber gave particular attention to those forms of power that involve stable and enduring relationships, and when power is structured in this way he learned it 'domination'. Power is structured in this way he termed it 'domination'. Power is structured into distinctive forms of domination through processes of rationalisation: Power relations that were formerly matters of unreflective custom and habit become more conscious and deliberate social practices. The rationalisation of action involves replacing the unreflective patterns of customary and habitual action by actions that are oriented towards calculations of self-interest and commitment to ultimate values. Weber seems to imply two forms of rationalisation, which may be called, respectively, 'instrumental rationalisation, and 'value rationalisation'. Customary or habitual forms of social order evolve through instrumental rationalisation into forms of social order that are sustained by calculations of expediency. Through value rationalisation they become forms of social order that are sustained by the conception of legitimacy (Weber, 30, cited here from Scott 1996: 22-23).

The Power in this kind of domination emerges from the probability that the command will be obeyed. In addition, Weber distinguished between three kinds of authority, rational-legal authority which is based on norms, ordinances and legality of the offices of those who exercise authority e.g. the authority exercised by the tax collectors, policemen, bosses in the office; traditional authority which is based on a belief in the sacred quality of long-standing traditions and in the legitimacy of those who exercise authority e.g. the domination of the eldest person the family; and charismatic authority which is based on devotion to the sacred quality, heroic strength or exemplary character of a person, e.g. authority of god-men (see Aron 1967).

b) Karl Marx: Class and Power

Marx (1954, 1955) is known for his conception of class and class struggle. More specifically, he identifies two classes: the *bourgeoisie* (or the ruling class) and the *proletariat* (or the working class) in the capitalist society. He says that the proletariat rules and commands obedience from the *bourgeoisie*. The basis of the power of the *bourgeoisie* is control over the capital on the one hand and its hold over the military force and production of ideas. In the words of Bottomore (1964: 24-25), "The lines of conflict are most sharply drawn in the modern capitalist societies, because in such societies the divergence of economic interests appears most clearly unobscured by any personal bonds such as those of feudal society, and because development of capitalism brings about a more radical polarisation of classes than has existed in any other type of society by its unrivalled concentration of wealth at one extreme of society and of poverty at the other, and by its gradual elimination of the intermediate and transitional social strata". The *proletariat*, on the other hand seek to increase the capital for the ruling class. The relationship between the two classes is one of exploitation in which the ruling class gains at the expense of the wage labourers constituting the *proletariat*.

Workers produce commodities for the *bourgeoisie* for which they receive wages. The wages are just enough for their subsistence. Surely, there is a vast difference between the value of the commodity the workers produce and the wages that they get this difference appropriated by the ruling class. The *proletariat* class is perpetually engaged in struggle over its wages and conditions of work. Earlier the struggle was disorganized and ineffective. Modern industry and factory system of production ushered an era of political organisation of class struggle. The class conscious political organisation emerged. Marx opines that some day, the *proletariat* will overthrow the *bourgeoisie* and get liberation from the long standing domination and exploitation.

c) Robert Michels: The Iron Law of Oligarchy

Michels believed that the craving for power is inherent in the nature of human beings. Those who acquire power, seek to perpetuate it. Against this backdrop, he propounds that democracy calls for organisation, which leads to oligarchy. The trend towards oligarchic rule in party organisations is better known as the Iron Law of oligarchy. He agreed that the "democratic currents of history" often "break ever on the same shoal". They are, however, "ever renewed". One of the reasons for the renewal of democracy is that oligarchies were felt to be oppressive and were overthrown. Michel insists that democratic currents will always break the Iron Law (Michels 1959).

It may be understood that the large collectivity of people in an organisation cannot govern or administer their common affairs. Over the period of time, specialisation develops and division of labour evolves. Organisations become increasingly complex. Some people are chosen to represent the masses and execute their will. According to Michels (1927) every organisation however democratic in the beginning develops an oligarchic character. He was convinced that masses await leaders to govern them and take care of their concerns. The leaders derive power from the incompetence of the masses in the domain of political life. The incompetent masses submit to the leaders of whose expertise they are convinced. Oligarchies preserve the stability and longevity of leadership. More importantly, the oppressive conditions in themselves, do not lead to unrest. It is the awareness of those conditions that generates class struggle. The struggles and revolts are often suppressed.

Michels maintains that it is appropriate to ascertain the limits imposed by oligarchies over individuals. He says that decentralisation does not necessarily give way to enhanced liberty in the hands of individuals; neither does it enhance the power of the rank and file. Usually, it serves as a mechanism by which weak leaders seek to get away from the dominion of the stronger ones. The weaker leaders, however, may establish a centralised authority within their own domains. One oligarchy gives way to many smaller oligarchies each powerful in its own sphere. He laid thrust on developing the spirit of free inquiry, criticism and control of the leaders among the masses. It may be noted that these are imperative in the process of strengthening democracy (Zeitlin 1987).

d) Steven Lukes: Power and Human Agency

Lukes affirms that all power is attributed to individual or collective human agents. Often human agents have several options or alternatives before them from which they choose their course of action. "Human agents exercise their characteristic powers when they act voluntarily on the basis of wants and beliefs which provide them with reasons for so acting. Such an exercise of the power of human agency implies that the agent at the point of action has the power to act otherwise, that is, at the least the ability and the opportunity both to act or not to act, it is in his power to do either; there is 'an openness between performing or failing to perform the action', and there is no set of external circumstances such that in those circumstances the agent will necessarily so act' (Lukes 1977, rpt. 1982: 159). Two conclusions emerge from this perspective: the one who exercises the power had the option or the alternative to act differently; and those on whom the power had the option or the alternative to act differently, if power was not exercised over them.

Luker's proposition of power accepts that despite the fact that actors operate within "structurally determined limits", they have a certain degree of autonomy and could act in a degree of autonomy and in a different way. In other words, there would be no place for power in a condition of total structural determinism and imposed constraints that determine the options of human agents. He cites the example of an employer who declares some of his workers redundant because he wants to cut costs. In another case, an official government liquidator declares an insolvent company bankrupt which throws the workers out of work. While the first case is a case of simple exercise of power, the second is not because we assume that the liquidator had no alternatives before him. Lukers conclusively says that social life may be properly understood as a dialectic of power and structure, a web of possibilities for agents to make choices and pursue strategies within given limits.

e) Anthony Giddens: Power as Dependency and Domination

Anthony Giddens's concept of power in the context of interaction is rooted in terms of domination. He distinguishes between power in the broad sense and power in the narrow sense. In the broad sense, power is explained as the transformative capacity of human agency. Here, the term capacity refers to the capability of an individual to bring about a change in the course of a series of events through intervention. On the other hand, power in the narrow sense is largely relational. It is the capability to effect results when these outcomes depend upon the agency of others. The basic difference between the two lies in the agency. While use of power in the broad sense

is grounded in the capability of an individual to effect outcomes directly, the use of power in the narrow sense is grounded in the capability to effect outcomes in situations when they depend upon others (Stewert 2001).

More specifically, in the narrow sense, power implies dependency upon the agency of others and the capability of an individual to prevail upon them. The thrust is on domination on the part of the individual who may be said to hold power and compliance on the part of others over whom the individual exercises control. This relationship then, may be understood as one of domination. Thus Giddens (1976; 111) writes, 'It is in this sense that men have power over others; this is power as domination'.

Giddens's basic conception of power has to do with acquisition and use of resources or capabilities expressed in struggles and subordination. In Giddens's own words (1976:111), 'Power in either the broad or restricted sense, refers to *capabilities.* Unlike the communication of meaning, power does not come into being only when being 'exercised', even if ultimately there is no other criterion whereby one can demonstrate what power actors possess. This is important because we can talk of power being 'stored up' for future occasions of use'. Later Giddens (1984) suggests that reproduction of structures of domination leads to generation of power. Power, therefore, depends upon the distribution of resources and the capability of individuals to make the most of them effectively. He upholds that in actual situations everyone does have possibilities of exercising power. An individual in a subordinate position is never completely dependent and is often able to convert the available resources 'into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system' (Giddens 1982: 32). Giddens opines that power is not always oppressive. In fact, power may best be understood as the capacity to achieve outcomes. In fact, power flows smoothly in processes of social reproduction in the larger matrix of structures of domination. More importantly, despite the fact that constraints of power cannot be ignored, power is often a medium for attaining freedom or emancipation.

f) Michael Foucault: Power as Domination

Michael Foucault identifies power with domination in conceptual, methodological and political terms. He distinguishes between the character of modern and classical power within the framework of domination. Disciplinary power as modern form of domination stands out in sharp contrast with sovereign power as pre-modern domination. Firstly, while disciplinary power is constant and completely pervasive, sovereign power is periodic (therefore not constant) and of low social penetration (therefore not all pervasive). Secondly, while domination in the disciplinary model makes the required action happen through political rationalities and technologies of power that seem to be inescapable, domination in the sovereignty model is expressed through prohibition, and if that fails, the punishment for the action which should not have been performed. Thirdly, while in the disciplinary model there is contrasting constitution of actors (subjectivisation in the sense of control and dependence) the sovereignty model is based on the givenness of the actors involved (Stewart 2001).

In the words of Foucault (1982:212) himself, "This (modern) form of power applies itself to everyday life which categories the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise

in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power, which subjugates and makes subject to. This implies that the law of truth constitutes the defining criterion of modern form of power. Further, modern form of power is based on relations of domination, hierarchy, asymmetry and control. He maintains that new forms of domination develop and he argues that liberation or freedom (both at the individual level and at the collective level) from the constraints is not possible. According to him, global public-oriented emancipatory politics is not possible. Surely, Foucault has been charged with a kind of fatalism, inherent in the conception of power.

8.4 The Concept of Elite

In a general sense, the term 'elite' was employed to refer to commodities of particular excellence. This restricted usage of the term in the seventeenth century was broadened later to include social groups such as higher ranks of mobility and others that could be treated as superior to the rest of them. It was only in the latter part of the nineteenth century that the term gained currency in sociological writings in Europe. In 1930s sociological theories of elite developed in Britain and America particularly in the writings of Vilfredo Pareto.

Pareto (1935) explained the concept of elite the terms of a class of people with highest indices (referring to sign of capacity e.g a successful lawyer has highest index, one who does not get a client has the lowest index in their branch of activity). This class of people is referred to as the elite. In more simple terms, Pareto defined elite by reference to facts which an outside observer is able to verify. Elite class, therefore, comprises of all those who have succeeded and are considered by their peers and the public as the best. When he spoke of the elite consistently, Pareto did not mean all those who have succeeded but those who exercise the political functions of administration or government and those who influence or determine the conduct of governing machinery though they are nor officials or ministers (see Arnon 1966). There are two categories: the non-elite (who may or may not have a role to play in the government) and the elite. The latter category i.e., the elite is divided into governing elite and non-governing elite. The elite class is divisible into two classes: the governing elite (constituted of people who have some say or who directly or indirectly play a part in the government) and the non-governing elite (constituted of the rest of the elite i.e., those who have to say or no role to play in the government). Pareto argued that the same individuals occupy the same rank in hierarchy for wealth as for other criteria (such as musical talent, level of intelligence and so on) and for the degree of political and social influence. This implies that the upper classes are also the richest and it is these classes that represent the elite. Later Pareto concerned himself with those who have power i.e., governing elite and the masses.

Pareto, however, recognized the element of mobility in the elite class i.e., he did not insist that the elite was a static category, which was constituted once and for all. He propounded the idea of 'circulation of elite'. There are atleast two channels through which the idea of circulation of elite may be explained. Circulation of elite refers to the process in which individuals circulate between the elite and the non-elite groups. It also refers to the

process in which one elite is replaced by another. Pareto's work does incorporate both the conceptions but the former conception referring to the circulation of individuals between elite and non-elite groups predominates. In the context of decay and renewal of aristocracies, Pareto observes "the governing class is restored not only in numbers but — and it is that the more important thing — in quality, by families rising from a lower classes". Apart from this he also makes mention of showing down of this circulation which leads to increase of degenerate elements in the classes which still hold power and increase in the elements of superior quality in the subject classes (i.e., non-elite class). In such a situation social equilibrium becomes unstable. Even a mild shock may be enough to crumble it. A new elite comes to power and establishes a new equilibrium after a conquest or a revolution. Pareto also repeatedly refers to circulation of individuals between the elite and non-elite classes. He suggested that the governing class constituting the elite might induct those people in the lower classes from whom they perceive threat or danger. When such people are inducted into the elite group they change their character completely and adopt the attitude and interests of the established elite.

Marie Kolabinska (a student of Pareto) identified circulation which takes place between different categories of the governing elite itself, and circulation which takes place between elite and the rest of the population (individuals from lower strata may manage to enter the existing elite class or individuals in the lower strata may from new elite groups which engage in a struggle for power with the existing elite). Kolabinska's work largely devoted to the study of circulation of elite in French society focused between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries (cited from Bottomore 1964).

Gaetano Mosca was the first to draw a distinction between elite and the masses. He explained that in all societies there are two classes of people: one that rules and the other that is ruled. The class which rules performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys all the advantages and privileges that accompany power. The class, which is ruled larger in terms of numerical composition and is governed and controlled by the former class through legal, sometimes arbitrary and violent means. Like Pareto, Mosca was also concerned with elites as groups of people vested with political power. Mosca explained that between the elite and the masses is the category of the sub-elite constituted of the 'new middle class' of civil servants, managers and white-collar workers, scientists, engineers, scholars and intellectuals. The sub-elite provides new recruits to the elite class. The sub-elite itself is a vital element in the government of society. Mosca suggested that the stability of any political system largely depends on the level of morality, intelligence and activity that this second stratum has attained. He accounted for the rise of new elite in part by the emergence of social forces, which represent new interests (e.g. technological or economic interests) in the society (see Bottomore 1964).

8.5 Power Elite and Veto Groups

In the context of power in America, C. Wright Mills (1956) proposed the concept of power elite (explained in terms of a unified power group composed of top government executives, military officials, and corporation directors) while David Riesman (1953) proposed the concept of veto groups (explained in terms of a diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups, each of which is primarily concerned with protecting its jurisdiction by blocking actions of other groups which seem to threaten that jurisdiction).

Kornhauser (1966) compares Mills and Reisman on power in America along five dimensions:

i) Structure of Power including how power is distributed among the major segments of present-day American society: Mills proposed that pyramid of power may be conceived as formed of three layers. The apex is occupied by power elite, the second layer is occupied by middle levels of power (constituted of diversified and balanced plurality of interest groups) while the third layer is occupied by mass society (constituted of powerless mass of unorganised people who are controlled form above). Riesman, on the other hand, proposed a pyramid formed of two rather than three layers. Riesman did not recognize the presence of power elite. The upper layer is occupied by veto groups. Here, instead of decisive ruling group is an amorphous structure of power centering in the interplay among interests groups that form the veto groups. The lower layer of the pyramid comprises more-or-less unorganised public which cooperates with (and is not dominated) the interest groups in their maneuvers against actual or threatened encroachments on the jurisdiction each claims for itself.

ii) Changes in the structure of power including how the distribution of power has changed in the course of American history: Mills lays emphasis on increasing concentration of power and the ascending of power elite, while Riesman lays emphasis on increasing dispersion of power and the tendency toward the dispersal of power among a plurality of organized interests.

iii) Operation of the structure of power including the means whereby power is exercised in American society: According to Mills, the power elite lays down all important public policies particularly foreign policy. The power elite manipulates the people at the bottom. Riesman, on the other hand, denied what Mills asserted. He said that who determines the policy largely depends on the issue about which policy is being laid out. Groups constituting veto groups are largely inoperative on several issues. Most of them become active in making decisions and laying out policies about issues that concern them or are of interest to them. This implies that there are as many power structures as the spheres of policy.

iv) Bases of the structure of power including how social and psychological factors shape and sustain the existing distribution of power: It is understandable that power is shared among who share common interests: For Mills, the power elite represents a body of people with common interests, for Reisman, the veto groups have diversity of interests.

v) Consequences of the structure of power including how the existing distribution of power affects American society: Mills said that, (a) the interests of the major institutions (corporations, armed forces, executive branch of government) whose leaders constitute the power elite are greatly enhanced in the existing power arrangements; (b) because of concentration of power in the hands of select few and manipulation for exercising power, there is decline of politics as public debate; (c) concentration of power has taken place without a corresponding shift in the bases of legitimacy of power. Power is supposed to reside in the hands of public and its elected representatives while in reality it lies in the hands of those who direct the key bureaucracies. Consequently, men of power are neither responsible nor accountable for their power; and (d) if power trends to a small group which is not accountable for its power, and if politics no longer involves genuine public debate then

there will be a severe weakening of democratic institutions. Conversely, Riesman said that no one group or class is favoured in a major way over others; politics has declined in meaning for many people which is not essentially due to the ascending of veto groups; there is growing discrepancy between the facts of power and images of power. Power is more widely dispensed than is generally believed; and power in America is situational and mercurial, it is amorphous because of which there is decline of effective leadership.

8.6   Power in Local Communities

The focus of community power is on decisions that are crucial to the people in a community. The basic question, therefore, is who wields the power to say about things which are important to many people in the community. The concern is with the ability to and/or the practice of deciding what is to be done in, for, by the community. (Spinrad 1965, rpt. 1966).

Box 8.2: Motivation for Decision-Making

'In the relatively pluralistic American Community, power over decision is not an automatic reflection of a prescribed hierarchal role description. A significant variable that emerges from the literature in the motivation to intervene in a particular decision-making process. Such motivation is simply a product of the extent to which that decision is salient to the group and / or the individual (Spinred, 1965).

Two scholars who have contributed significantly to the subject of community, power are Delbert Miller and Robert Dahl (see D. Anotnio and J. Ehrlich 1961). They have initiated a debate based on their own studies and research. The basic issue of contention is, who holds power on local communities. Miller asserts that the business elite makes decisions in local communities. Dahl, on the other hand, argues that rather than being monolithic, power structure is pluralistc. We will discuss the critical features of the two points of view in some detail now.

Delbert Miller chose knowledgeable informants from the community.   He asked them to select out of a prepared list of important, well-known people belonging to different organisations and institutions those whom they thought were powerful in getting things done. Now, Miller interviewed the people who were selected by the knowledgeable informants. He also asked them whose help they would seek if they wanted to get something done. This was referred to as the 'reputational technique'. Miller concluded that most of the knowledgeable informants said businessmen were the ones who could get things done. They do influence policy making in local communities to a large extent. Here, local governments are not strong bodies and elected officials are often businessmen, lawyers and politicians of the community, itself. This was true of the 'Pacific City. A study of the 'English City' however suggested on Miller that not businessmen but labour is significant as also leaders from the domain of education, religion, and welfare and status groups. Based on two of the above-mentioned studies, Miller concluded that power pattern is not essentially identical in all American Communities.

Robert Dahl studied New Haven. His methodology of research differed sharply from that of Miller. Dahl found out the specific decisions on specific issues. What is more important is that he looked for specific decision makes in

specific situations two. This Technique was referred to as 'event analysis'. He concluded that the role of businessmen in decision-making was minor in contrast to the assertion of Miller. He explained that while there is no denying that businessmen have lot of resources of their disposal but it in equally true that they have several liabilities by which they are constrained and because of which they cannot emerge as the major contributors in decisions making process. Therefore, not one centre of power but many loci of power exist. Dahl believes that mayors and their staff have increasingly by become the initiators and organisers of important community decision. Miller insists that the political leaders are uncertain about themselves and wait for the cues from others, while businessmen have a clearly defined image and act with more assertion (Spinnad 1965, rpt. 1966).

Apart form Milleer and Dahl, Edward Banfield (1961) made significant contribution in the domain of community power by studying six specific community problems in Chicago. He reached to the conclusion that surely the businessmen in Chicago occupying top positions in national corporations and regional commercial and banking institutions are endowed with resources that give them unlimited power. Yet, the businessmen do not dominate critical community decisions. The chief reasons for abstaining from this sphere is lack of unity and of interests; and cost entailed in making interventions. They seem to be satisfied and let go of situations if their vested interests are not at stake. On the other hand if their personal interests are threatened or jeopardized, they become excessively involved and use their influence in effecting decisions. Banfield agrees with Dahl in upholding that the chief decisions in Chicago are taken by mangers of large organisations, few civic leaders, and the chief elected officials.

Banfield seems to consider the political leaders as potentially omnipotent when they go all out on any question. This calls for using up their limited working capital; and coming into confrontation with other power groups besides national government, businessmen other strong community elements that may be affected and take an opposite stand. They, therefore, are slow to take up issues and often look for compromises (Spinrad 1965, rpt. 1966).

8.7 Conclusion

It is evident that the notion of power so commonly used in day-to-day parlance has many dimensions and operated in many different ways. Sociologists have conceptualised power in terms of domination, as a repressive and oppressive force as also an enabling resource. Power, has we have noted rests both with the elite and with the local community. Power enfolds a dynamism of sorts in its very nature and regulates nearly all relationships in society which makes it of special interest to sociologists.

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Unit 9
Class and Legitimacy

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you should be able to

▫   locate the various types of legitimacy

▫   outline the bases of legitimacy

▫   describe the fluid bases of legitimacy

9.1   Introduction

In this unit, we shall be discussing to important concept of sociology that is class and legitimacy. In the first part of this unit, we shall be concentrating on the concept of class as elaborated by Karl Marx. In the second part, we shall be dealing with the notion of legitimacy as propagated by Max Weber. Let us begin with the concept of class.

Class in conventional sense is a collectivity or a group of people who have some characteristics in common. Several scholars have identified several characteristics in identifying classes. They have also located the position of class in the society in different ways. For Marx, economic position is the prime in locating class position of a group of people in the society. To put it very simply, class to him is a category of people, who have a common economic interest against those of other class in the society. These to him, are the objective economic condition for the formulation of classes in the society. To him, however, class is not only an economic category, but also a social force to bring about changes in the society. Here, he emphasises on the issue of subjective consciousness as the key factor for the transformation of the economic categories of the class as the change agents to bring about revolution in the society. Thus, to him a category of people with a common economic interest viz – a – viz other form class-in-itself. And when this class-in-itself is mediated by subjective class consciousness, it emerges to be class-for-itself. Indeed, it is the revolutionary class who is ready for action and change in the society.

It is important that class is not static social category: rather is undergoes a process of transformation of the society. In each of the economic stage of

every society, class is distinctly placed with distinctive social and historical roles. We have to understand, this in detail Marxian concept of class relation and change.

Class Relation and Change

In all the stages of economic transformation of society, there have been specific forms of class struggles. Social classes according to Karl Marx are the main agents of social change. The change is however based on class conflict. Thus to him "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

Classes, to Marx, are formed based on objective material conditions. These are groups of people with a common economic position vis-a-vis those of other class. In essence this economic interest is conflicting and contradictory to each other's class position. These class relations get transformed for hostile action against each other with the intermediation of class consciousness. The objective material conditions form the basis for the formation of 'class-in-itself which get transformed in 'class-for-itself' in the process of transversing of subjective class consciousness.

To Karl Marx, though the class relation was very complicated in the earlier epochs of history, in the modern stage of capitalism this has been simplified. In the modern capitalist society new classes however have emerged with new condition of operation and new form of struggle between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the of production i.e., the 'haves') and the protetariat (i.e. the 'have-nots').

According to Marx, under capitalism wage labourers are paupers who grow more rapidly than the population and wealth. The essential conditions both for the existence and sway of the bourgeoisie class is the formation and augmentation of capital. "The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourer, due to completion, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, is its grave diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable (119)

9.2 Capitalism, Class Relations and Development

Modern industry has established the world market that has given immense scope of development to commerce, navigation and communication by land. These developments again have paved the way for the extension of industries and free trade.

The bourgeoisie class constantly maximises its profit through the expansion of new markets, introduction of new technology, extraction of surplus value and exploitation of the proletariat. However, along with these developments there emerge new forces of contradiction within the capitalists system. Notwithstanding the emergence of new forces of contradiction, the

bourgeoisie was very revolutionary in their outlook and action. According to Marx "The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part….. the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."

Through the exploitation of the world market the bourgeoisie has given the production and consumption process a cosmopolitian character. The old industries got destroyed. The old national industries got dislodged. Industry in the capitalist system no longer worked only on indigenous raw material but raw materials drawn from the remotest zones, whose product are consumed in every quarter of the globe. "In place of old wants satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one sideness and narrow mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature"(112).

The capitalists according to Marx also subjected nature to the force of man and machinery through the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraph, canalisation of rivers etc. All these facilitated the scope of free commodification of the economy at world scales. There also emerged free competition accompanied by social and political institutions to adopt to it.

The modern capitalist however, according to Marx, has inherited and nurtured the seeds of its destruction in its own womb. In proportion to the growth of the bourgeoisie there has emerged the modern working class — the proletariat "These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market." (114)

For Marx the essence of the captor is to maximize profit through commodification of the production process. As long as capitalism is based on private ownership the means of production, it maximizes profit of the private producers. This profit is again maximised by exchange proceeding from money to money by way of commodity. Gradually the proceed from many to money by way of commodity end up with more money than one had at the outset (Aron, 1965 : 128). To explain the sources of profit Marx talked about the theory of value, wage and surplus value. To him the value of any commodity is roughly proportional to the quality of human labour contained in it. The wage capitalists pay to the workers as the compensation for the labour power the worker rent to the capitalist is equal to the amount necessary for the existence of the workers and their family to produce the merchandise for the capitalist. Under the capitalist system, workers receive the wage which is less than the actual duration of the work; that is less than the value of the commodity he or she produces. Here comes the notion of 'surplus value' which refers to 'the quality of value produced by the workers beyond the necessary labour time'. Under the capitalist system the workers do not get the wage for the quality of the value produced beyond the necessary labour time.

In return the wage received by a workman is restricted only to the means of his subsistence and survival. Marx calculated that the price of a commodity and therefore "also of labour is equal to its cost of production". In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of work increases the wage decreases. With the increase in the proportion of the use of machinery and division of labour the burden of toil of the labour also increases in terms of increase in the working hours, and increase in the quantum of work. "The proletariat is without property. His relation to his children and wife has no longer anything in common with the bourgeoisie family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjugation to capital, the same in England, as in France, in America and Germany, has tripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interest," (118).

Gradually the number the proletariat also increases to gain more strength and awareness. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, artisans, peasants also join the army of the proletariat in their fight against the bourgeoisie. To Marx "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority." And again Marx writes: In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat

9.3 Concept of Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to lawful and regular activity which could be justified on one or the other reasonable ground. For example, the use of public money for some legitimate purposes, legitimate reasons for one's absence from office or work and being born of persons legitimately related / married are such cases that give us some initial ideas about the use of this term legitimacy. in our daily life-experiences we come across several such cases when we accept the actions of others as correct, acceptable and justified. We normally do not question such actions of others. But sometimes we come across such instances when we think that the action of the others are not justifiable. When we begin to question the action of others, we get some vague idea of the term legitimacy. What right one has got to speak to us like this ? Who is he to order us to do certain things ? These are the questions that arise in our minds when we are not ready to accept other's actions, judgements or orders as such. It could be understood like what is the legitimate ground on which one is asking us to do certain favours. This question is related to the action of others, but sometimes questions are raised about one's status as well. A reference to the questions like this has already been made. People born out of the legimate relationship like marriage are known as legitimate children. In this way the notion of legitimacy covers much wider area than with which we are normally concerned.

9.4 Why Legitimacy?

Throughout the world – in modern times as well as in history, the people or governments in power have attempted normally to justify their occupation of power over the people over whom they have ruled. The people in power

must be in a position to demonstrate that their occupation of power is legitimate as well. For example, in democratic countries the people who govern are elected on a regular basis. In such countries elections are held after a certain period of time and only the elected representatives can govern over the people. The people in power have always attempted to somehow justify their hold on certain privileged positions which includes rewards as well. They have been able to develop certain mechanisms through which they were able to justify their claims over their subordinates and the people in general. On the other hand, these subordinates also require some basis on which to accept the claims of their superiors. In this way legitimacy could resolve the possibilities of conflict between those who govern and those who are being governed. Legitimacy thus resolves the conflict between differing claims of people as it is important specially in those cases that are related to the distribution of power in society. As stated earlier, the scope for the issues centered around legitimacy is much wider that it apparently appears. A meaningful and scientific analysis of some of these issues is discussed in the sociological discourse.

9.5 Bases of Legitimacy: Traditional, Legal-Rational and Charismatic

The credit must go in favour of Max Weber a prominent sociologist from Germany, who not only identified the importance of the issues like legitimacy but also attempted to make a scientific analysis of it. After establishing legitimacy as an important issue for sociological analysis, Max Weber attempted to clarify the important bases of legitimacy. Max Weber identified three main bases of legitimacy namely, what he calls it, traditional, legal-rational and charismatic, Max Weber has also distinguished between power and authority. According to Max Weber, power refers to the capacity of the actor to carry out his will inspite of resistance. According to him legitimate power is called authority.

9.6 Traditional Authority

One could derive legitimacy on the basis of traditional grounds. Not very long back in history, several kings throughout the world ruled over the people on the basis of traditional authority. If the authority was derived on the traditional basis (as in the case of kings) then it was not generally questioned by the people. Several traditional legends and epics also supported the rule of the king as he was considered to be the representative of God. The basic understanding behind the rule of the king was like this: the king has been ordered by God to look after the welfare of its people.

Box 9.1: Ascribed Status

Apart from the king several village – chiefs in India also enjoyed this traditional authority. In India, traditional village-panchayats as well as caste-panchayats have displayed ample scope for traditional authority to flourish. Similarly there have been numerous cases of the tribal-chiefs in several poets of Asia, Africa and Latin America. All such examples address to one central question. Why the rulers in earlier societies were able to rule over people without much problems and resistence from them ? The answer is that these rulers used traditional basis of legitimacy to derive power and were able to morally justify their actions in the name of the welfare of the subordinate and disadvantaged categories of people. Traditional authority is also associated

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with the ascribed status of most of its people in society. Who actually appointed one to occupy such a privileged position ? On what basis one issues certain orders that are to be followed by the most of the people ? These type of questions are generally avoided by the people and a major source of such a form of resolution of conflicts generally happens to be the prevalent traditional authority. Thus, if the power structure derives its legitimacy on traditional grounds, it is understood as a case of traditional authority.

9.7 Legal-Rational Authority

According to Max Weber, the second base of legitimacy is legal – rational. This type of authority has been found in almost all the modern societies of the world. It is also known as legal-rational authority. The most appropriate expression of such legal-rational authority could be what is now a days known as bureaucracy. Max Weber himself had identified bureaucracy as an important and emerging phenomenon throughout the world and himself made a conceptual analysis of it. Although some other scholars from other social-sciences as well later tried to understand the notion of bureaucracy in the changing scenario of the world, but due to the intellectual craftsmanship of Max Weber his formulations on bureaucracy still enjoy a commandable respect. In fact Max Weber's discussion involves much more than what is generally attributed to his formulations on bureaucracy. For example, Max Weber's formulations on bureaucracy includes what he calls it "ideal-type", modern organisations and his overall methodology of social-sciences. The basic idea here has been to understand how does bureaucracy get legitimacy in modern organisations on the grounds of legal-rational authority. Before proceeding further it seems necessary to clarify some opinions regarding bureaucracy.

Box 9.2: Ideal Type Bureaucracy

The notion of bureaucracy has been hailed as well as condemned by various scholars, academicians and political strategists. The discourses on bureaucracy also go beyond the academic discussions and several times its role has been questioned on political and moral grounds. On the basis of his understanding, particularly in the U.S.A., Max Weber constructed an ideal-type of bureaucracy which included eleven characteristics attached to it. A clarification seems necessary at this stage. Although Max Weber's notion of ideal-type is not being discussed here as such, but certain points about it must be kept in mind, since he discussed about ideal-type of bureaucracy.

First, it must be kept in mind that ideal-type has nothing to with the ideal conditions that are supposed to be achieved by any individual or organisation. Second, it was suggested by Max Weber that all the characteristics as they are stated to comprise bureaucracy are not to be found in any actually existing bureaucratic organisation. Third, the opposite of ideal-type is real-type which might actually be found in society. But as ideal-type received importance in the sociological literature, its counterpart real-type neither received importance nor it was used as such in the discipline at later stages of research. But then what was the need to construct the ideal-type. Max Weber believed that ideal-type is useful and could be constructed whenever we are dealing with unknown or less familiar situations.

Max Weber has clarified the notion of legal-rational basis of legitimacy in detail. This legal-rational basis of legitimacy is realised through bureaucracy in modern organisations. At this stage the readers are advised to keep in mind, compare the contrast this type of legitimacy with its other types. The main characteristics of bureaucracy could be discussed in the following way.

1) In any bureaucratic organisation there are written rules which are followed by everyone from top to the bottom in a defined way. The work and orders related to it are given from those who are at the top of the organisation and are to be followed by those at the lower level. Bureaucracy involves a lot of work on paper, which means that no verbal orders could be given. Similarly only such orders could be given which are appropriate according to the rules. Meaning thereby that wrong orders could neither be given nor they are to be followed. The work and orders on paper reduce the chances of personal biases against each other. The idea behind such an organisation and style of work is that if the issues are correct and correspond to the existing state of laws then they should be completed. The aims of the perfect bureaucratic organization include the cases and not the people.

2) As bureaucratic organisations do their work on paper, it is done by its permanent employees. Rules of the office regulate recruitment of the staff and its promotions. The nature and working of such an organisation happens to be different from the individuals who comprise it. The idea behind such an organisation has been to ensure complete non-interference from any quarter, completely transparent and impersonal working.

3) Although Weber's work was concerned with the public bureaucracy his emphasis on rationality associated with it extended the use of this concept in the private sectors as well. Since Weber believed in the rational basis of legitimacy for both i.e. bureaucracy as well as the then emerging enterprises, it was to be hoped that bureaucracy might finally find a place in the private business organisations as well.

4) There seems to be a need to understand and examine this legal – rational form of legitimacy as it expressed through bureaucracy. In practice, however, certain characteristics which were contrary to the formulations of Max Weber were noted by some scholars. For example, the issues like misgovernance, incompetence, unnecessary paper work and frustration of people in bureaucracy have been referred by several scholars. These dysfunctions of bureaucracy have been referred in the case of capitalist as well socialistic type of governance – systems. But the credit of highlighting the legal-rational form of legitimacy and its analysis goes to Max Weber.

9.8 Charismatic Authority

Max Weber has defined it as the third basis of legitimacy. These grounds of acquiring legitimacy are quite different from the previous bases. Charismatic authority is based neither on traditional nor legal-rational basis. It is quite different form the two previously discussed bases of legitimacy. Charisma refers to certain qualities in a person which provide him something like a

spiritual grace or capacity to inspire others and fill in enthusiasm among the people. These are certain qualities that are not found in every type of personality-systems, they appear rarely among the people. Those who possess these qualities are generally able to garner support without much difficulty. They are able to lead the people on the basis of these rare qualities located within their personality-system and also due to their unique approach to tackle the problems of society. In this sense each Charismatic leader has got not only a unique personality system to convince others but also an approach that looks different from other previous approaches to solve the problems of society. If we attempt to analyse the relationship between a Charismatic leader and his followers, then we realise that this sort of a relationship itself is quite different from others.

Box 9.3: Personal Traits and Qualities

As a Charismatic leader thinks and delivers, his followers simply work deliberately according to the whims and wishes of their leader. On this basis the leader derives legitimacy for his words and action as people simply follow him without questioning him. We can understand it in other words as well. The personal traits and qualities in Charismatic leaders happen to be such that in a majority of cases they are capable enough to overpower the others particularly those who are his followers. It is like, if the Charismatic leader proposes something his followers are likely to second it immediately without asking for much. The followers of the Charismatic leader in fact keep him in high esteem and his personal qualities influence the followers in such a way that they generally agree to do anything for him. It reflects an unending, enduring and permanent sort of faith of the followers in their leader. The Charismatic leader on its part also seems capable of solving any problem, at least his followers believe it.

The followers believe in the Charismatic leader and don't generally attempt to distinguish between what is right or wrong about his approach. The Charismatic leader is actually able to inspire others who in turn develop a sort of faith in him which to a great extent is like a permanent one. Weber has expressed the optimistic point of view about the Charismatic sort of leadership. Accordingly, Charisma has been considered as a force which could challenge or question bureaucratic rigidity. For example, in the context of modern society a Charismatic leadership might critically examine the role of bureaucracy on particular issues like the child labour or human rights. Charismatic leadership presumes a set of belief - system which keeps intact the relationship between the leaders and his followers.

Reflection and Action 9.2

Outline the notion of charisma. How does charisma get reutilized? Write down your answer in a notebook.

Max Weber was of the opinion that it is possible for a leader to show his Charisma once, but it is not enough. Since the expectations of the followers gain new heights, the leadership in question gets compelled to show its Charisma once again. In fact the followers expect their leader to show his Charisma more than once. Once is not enough sort of situation generally engulfs the leader. These higher expectations of the followers compell the leader to think again and again and to work out for something new which could be considered as a functional equivalent to his own Charisma shown

earlier. And since his personality – system has certain unique attributes, sometimes he becomes able to show his Charisma again. Max Weber has identified process this 'routinisation of Charisma'. Without it one fails to remain and occupy the status of a Charismatic leader. T.K. Oommen has studied one such case of leadership in the context of the Indian society. According to him the role of Vinoba Bhave in the Bhoodan-Gramdam movement could be identified as that of a Charismatic leader. It was found in the study that the Charismatic leadership of Vinoba Bhave resulted in favour of the stability of the system but change in the approach, especially when certain powerful people donated their land willingly in favour of the poor people. Thus Charismatic authority refers to a unique sort of basis for legitimacy which is different from earlier discussed traditional and legal-rational bases of legitimacy.

9.9   Legitimacy and Social Changes

Although Max Weber referred to three bases of legitimacy, but society has undergone several changes since then. Max Weber's characterisation of legitimacy into three types resembles with his others conceptualisations as well and in a sense they could be considered as ideal or pure types. Max Weber's formulations, although included important bases of legitimacy, but his list of such bases might not be an exhaustive one. For example, in modern society another important base for legitimacy has been identified which is related to professional authority. There are people like doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, computer personnel and lawyers who specialise in their own jobs and undergo rigorous training and study for longer years to learn about their jobs. As a result of it, these professionals have a say of their own, they are free to take decisions in their specialised areas and for such an action they are quite competent to do so. Thus, the power acquired in such a way is known as professional authority and it derives legitimacy on the basis of specialisation achieved after a longer period of training. One example might be given here, it is the doctor who is capable to decide the type of treatment to be given to the patient. Such decision can't be taken by the people having traditional, legal-rational or Charismatic authority.

Now a days societies of the world are changing at a much faster pace than before. This period of change is also referred to as the period of transformation of societies. During this process of change, sometimes it becomes difficult for the people to understand various claims for legitimacy. At times we come across conflicting claims about legitimacy. For example, who must be the appropriate person to decide about the marriage of a boy in the Indian society happens to be one such important question. If the parents take the decision about the marriage then it is the case for traditional authority and if the boy himself takes the decision and decide to marry in the court of law then it is a case for legal-rational authority. A married couple could derive legitimacy of their relationship to each other either on traditional or on legal-rational basis. In the empirical situation sometimes we come across conflicting claims based upon different grounds for legitimacy. For example, regarding the decision of marriage conflicting claims might be seen between traditional and legal-rational basis of legitimacy. In the rapidly changing societies, sometimes it becomes difficult to really identify the real basis for legitimacy. The rapid changes that are taking place in the societies of the world have created such conditions where sometimes it becomes difficult to decide the grounds or bases of legitimacy. In the classical

sociological literature itself we come across discussions where societies could not really enjoy the fruits of development. Development of societies alongwith it have brought some undesirable conditions as well. For example.

Emile Durkheim has referred to 'pathological conditions of society'. Karl Marx has talked about 'alienation' in the capitalist society. These conditions provide the grounds for the crisis of legitimacy. Under such conditions sometimes one fails to decide on how to decide the legitimate grounds for actions. In modern societies, particularly in the case of the U.S.A., C. Wright Mills referred to the prevailing 'uneasiness' and 'indifference' in society which has emerged as a result of the threat on the existing values which itself are eroding fast. In simple words, whenever we come across some assertions like "Who are you to say so ?" or "Who is he to issue orders like that", we could see the beginning of the emerging crisis of legitimacy. Whenever the older and known bases of legitimacy are questioned and new bases have not yet emerged, it could be identified as the situation referring to crisis of legitimacy. This crisis of legitimacy has been seen particularly in the case of the western countries, but some developing countries of the world might also see such conditions as emerging. Although the older grounds for legitimacy have been challenged in the modern society, but this resultant crisis of legitimacy could well be managed on the newer grounds of legitimacy. But one trend which could be seen as emerging throughout the world at the moment is that the area of legal-rational basis of legitimacy is increasing everyday.

9.10 Conclusion

The notion of legitimacy has got much wider applications than as it appears from its conceptual usages. In the changing era and in the new world order the notion of legitimacy has acquired newer meanings and wider applications. Some countries of the world have democratically elected governments and they derive legitimacy on the grounds of being elected by the people. Non-elected governments might face some problems at home and abroad as it might become increasingly difficult for them to derive the sort of legitimacy required to rule over the people. On the other hand people who wage an armed struggle against the state and terrorists groups do not enjoy legitimacy even though they claims like fighting for the cause of the people. In recent times all the terrorist – groups throughout the world have lost public support or sympathies and the public opinion has been built-up against their violent actions. In the modern political analysis, one significant question that has come up is concerned with the issues related with elections. Elections have acquired a new meaning and new dimensions in modern society. The issues like terrorism and organised violence are losing grounds in the modern polity. People in general and intellectuals in particular have been asking the questions like : Why these terrorist organisations can't contest elections ? In this way elections and elected governments have acquired the sort of legitimacy of which even the thought or idea was not possible just a century ago. Some international organisations like the Common wealth of Nations accept the participation of only democratically elected governments as its legitimate member – states. The war against terrorism has acquired international dimensions. In modern political – analysis, thus the issues concerning legitimacy have acquired a new scope, meaning and dimensions. Similarly the international agreement on human rights and the establishment of various national human rights commissions in different nation states have given a new meaning to the quality of life. It sounds like that these human rights

should become the legitimate possession of the people and any violation against it whether it is by any individual, group or even state could be judged as a crime which is an illegitimate action. Such issues provide us an opportunity to understand the changing dimensions of the issues concerning legitimacy.

9.11 Further Reading

Weber, Max 1958, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Saribrers

Weber, Max 1968, *Economy and Society 3 Vols Totawa*, NJ.: Bedminster Press

Unit 10
Power: Functional Perspective

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit lesson you should be able to

- Grasp the meaning of power

- Understand the praxis of power

10.1 Introduction

We begin by grasping the meaning of 'power' in day to day use and dictionaries.

- Then we turn to the way three political philosophers of 17th and 18th centuries reflected upon its need for society, and the nature of power acceptable to people.

- A political scientist and another turned as a sociologist gave their views on limits of power and sovereignty, thereby introducing the significance of other associations and groups in society. Their orientations are presented briefly.

- Two major sociologists – Max Weber and Talcott Parsons contributed to the discussion on the nature of power and its legitimacy. Their scope for power holders as discussed by the former; and the capacity of the social system to realise common goals and increase its capacity as brought out by Talcott Parsons are explained.

- In understanding the unit, the student will find it useful to refer to units on function and others on power.

- To make the concepts and situations clearer an effort has been made to illustrate a few points from the Indian setting and such material is not based on examples drawn from the classical authors.

The word 'Power' has its roots is Latin 'potis' 'posse' or 'pot-ere' which signify 'to be also'. The word has been used in several senses in daily life like 'horse power' that measures energy, 'power-loom' as distinct from the hand-loom, conveying the idea of mechanical energy. In mathematics when we write x^3, that means x is multiplied by itself three times. If the value of x is 2 than 2^3 is 2 raised to the power 3, that is 2 x 2 x 2 = 8. Here 'power' is used for making a small number larger. These examples give a general idea that power implies a capacity to increase energy and to enable a person or

a thing to enlarge its scope. It is a good idea to learn how we come to such an understanding. We recommend the use of a standard dictionary to get first acquaintance with a word we want to learn about. In this paragraph, two sources have been used : (i) The Concise Oxford Dictionary and (ii) Chamber's twentieth Century Dictionary. The larger volume of Oxford English Dictionary also mentions how a word was used first and by whom. The curious students may develop this as a habit for learning various meanings and usages of a word consulting any standard dictionary. That is the beginning. Dictionary of sociology and international encyclopedia are further advancements.

When a word is used many times, the dictionary also notes some words that convey a similar sense. The Oxford Concise Dictionary for example uses words like ability to do or act, influence authority under one's control. This question has been answered in another lesson unit. Now we reach the second stage.

10.2 Early Writers: Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau

Discussion of a few key words are found in general literature in the writings of early scholars who expressed their view even before sociology was born. In their writings we try to locate the meaning and significance of these words. Here the word 'power' and its possible links with function are seen through the contribution of three writers : Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.

By definition power relations relate to unequal positions and the inter relations among persons placed therein. Here a serious question is raised 'why should' inequality to tolerated or accepted even at the philosophical level? We have the other idea 'Man was born free, every where he is in chains. This idea was most vigorously talked about in France when it was socially preparing for the French Revolution of 1789. The king claimed 'divine right' so the struggle had to be targeted on both the king and the priest who justified that right, there was a struggle for human secular forces to became stronger. 'Man is the measure of all things' become the new dictum. Secular knowledge was compiled in Encyclopedias.

Among political philosophers, **Hobbes** (1588-1679) had raised the question about the nature of man. It appears that he talked about the primitive persons who were equal to one another.

The difference between man and man is not so considerable, as that one man can claim himself any benefit to which another man may not pretend, as well as he if any two men desire the same thing, which they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies, endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another. In the nature of man, we find three causes of quarrel : Competition, Diffidence, and Glory. The first one leads men to use violence, to make themselves. Mosters of other men's persons wives, children and cattle', second to defend them; the third for trifles as a word a smile or by reflection in their kindred friends nations or profession. (Ref. In Parsons *et al.,* 1960).

'Everyman is enemy to every man. No account of time, no arts, no letters, no society…... and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. Hence, the need for the laws of nature and a common power to keep them in awe and answer the need for maintaining order. His solution lay in agreed reasoning and the institution of a ruler (king) for the purpose. Hobbes has been considered a brilliant thinker for raising the problem of order in society,

though other thinkers disagree with the depiction of human nature and the solution. However, for our present purposes, it may be clarified that power is seen to fulfill the function of maintaining order.

John Locke (1632-1704) agrees on the equality of man and confers a right on him to punish the wrong doer such liberty could be misused; if the victim is to be the judge also. Hence there need for the state that with common consent will perform this role, and the advocacy of the civil government.

Rousseau (1712-1778) is the most famous of the three writers and had tremendous influence on the ideas leading to the French Revolutions (1789). He is associated with the remark 'Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains from the state of nature, human beings moved to develop a general will which could provide the rationale for exercise of power and even kings and tyrants could not ignore the power of the general will, hence the rationale for abolition of kingdoms and bringing in Republics. View of Hobbes, Locke and Roussean were examined in critical details by political philosophers, but the main reasons for referring to the three written are the following:

1)   The need for having central authority to maintain order was emphasised; and in this sense state was associated with a function.

2)   Unequal distribution of power needs an explanation and a justification. Here two aspects become important: who gets power over whom? What is its legitimacy?

There two questions will be dealt with in relation to the individuals and the state itself.

10.3 Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century discussions on society were dominated by the ideas and progress (August Comte). Herbert Spencer joined together ideas of society as an organism with evolution, the former giving the state a prime position in the functioning of the society. The near musical chair race was the main feature of the French society, where the monarchy and the republic continued to replace one another. Ultimately the Third Republic got stabilized in 1871. The intelligentsia had a stake in its success. An army that was as efficient as an emperor's was created. Special institutions for training the civil service, technicians and leaders came into being. The church still controlled education. The education minister restricted opening of new school, state sponsored schools were started. Yet, their efficiency had to be maintained (In India, we are familiar with the difference in mission schools and state run schools). The Minister consulted Durkheim, whose professional advice was that the teachers had to be trained first for the new tasks. The politician offered this task to Durkheim, and asked him to undertake the responsibility. Durkheim;s first appointment was Professor of Education in provincial town Bordeaux. Education was seen as a socializing force for a secular society. The role of the Church in education and the state was reduced; and educations was seen in a functional manner strengthening the Republic. Education through the Church was functional for the monarchy, after the revolution new education became functional for the Republic, and dysfunctional for the Church and the monarchy in France.

10.4 Twentieth Century Writers

Among sociologists of the twentieth century, the name of **Robert M. MacIver**

in the USA is the most significant. He began as a professor of Political Science and wrote the book 'State'. This was a departure from those who considered that sovereignty of the state was absolute and indivisible (Austin). In his famous statement **MacIver** said "The state is not coeval and co-extensive with society." He re-examined the relations among different organs of society and examined three possibilities:

1) Activities that the state alone could do

2) Activities that the state could perform better than other associations, and

3) Activities that other organisations could perform better than the state.

In his view the state was one of the great associations in society. These views were elaborated in a classical text book he wrote in collaboration with **Charles H.** page under the title *Society* which has been read carefully in India for nearly half a century by students of sociology.

Reflection and Action 10.1

Are state and society the same? Examine all sides of this question.

In the U.K. **Harold Laski** had a great influence on political movements and in his work *Grammar of Politics*, he propounded the view that there were plural centres of power in society, and the state was one of them. For students who read Laski as well as MacIver, the plural sources of power become important in discussing the nature of inter actions of the state and other associations group in society. The overall effect is that the state and polity began to be treated as dependent variables.

10.5 Max Weber and Talcott Parsons

Of the two questions mentioned earlier those regarding the nature of power and its legitimacy, were centrally considered by the German classical sociologist Max Webler and commented upon among others by Talcott Parsons who advanced the view that the state represented the agency for realising the collective goals of a social system. It is to these writers that we now turn our attention.

Box 10.1: Max Weber: An Introduction

Max Weber, an eminent German sociologist was born on 29th April, 1864 and lived and worked upto 1920. We invite your attention to the reference to his works as given in the units for the Bachelor's degree and other units for Master's programme of the IGNOU. It may be recalled that the period was marked by economic growth and political consolidation of Germany as a great power, with intense international competition and the first world war (1914-1918), and Weber's expert opinion was available at the time of signing of the peace treaty at Versailles in France and later for drafting a constitution for the Weimar, Republic. His family background of active politicians university professors and religious schools had given him ample first hand experience of the political processes capitalistic and bureaucratic working. As an eminent thinker, he conceptualised and analysed these experiences and at the world level of discussions tried to find why in Western Europe and Western Europe alone, a series of events happened in the ninetieth century to make it a globally significant entity. He had compared systems of different religions to

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find out the way ideas had a major influence on economic growth. This little reminder reintroduced Max Weber to us; the German pronunciation of Max is like Maax. The European scholars continue to refer to his works is original in German. In India, we rely on the English translations which at times disturb the European scholars. Among sociologists in India, Irawati Karve, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Chadrasekharaya and Surendra Munshi had acquired competence in German and tried to help us imbibe the flavour of that language in the study of the German sociologists i.e. sociologists choosing to write their major works in German (Max Weber, Marx Simmel, Tonnies and later Dahrendorf).

For Max Weber the organisation of social life on the basis of relational calculations and rationality as a system of thought was the most distinguishing feature of nineteenth century Europe. He viewed different aspects of life like economy, polity and even music according to the way they expressed rationality. Thus, he distinguished profit based on plunder and illegal practices from rational capitalism. Likewise the performance of music in orchestra with a number of instruments tuning together drew his attention. His discussion on power is related to the use of legitimate power or authority. He mentions three types of power based on three types of rationality or rules :

a) **Tradition**

When power is acquired and passed on to the next person in traditional societies from a king to the eldest son; it becomes a case of legitimation of power through tradition. In a matrilineal society, it is the sister's son who becomes a king (Malayalam region). In the north-eastern part of India, the youngest daughter's husband, known as nokrom becomes the effective manager. The king's brother succeeded the king in other territories. These differences are examples of tradition in their own societies. In an American tribe power belonged to a person who destroyed or burnt the valued things — in that case called potlatch one who burned the largest number of blankets became the chief and retained his position until some one else broke the record. The world over, in tribal setting or in chiefdoms, rules of acquiring power were based on traditions of the region concerned. These examples have been added by us, not by Max Weber, to illustrate the central idea. He used the examples of feudal lords and their relations to a king to analyse tradition as a source of legitimation of power.

b) **Bureaucracy**

The word bureau literally refers to a large table with a number of drawers. Different papers dealing with a common subject can be placed in one drawer. A number of drawers help in the classification of papers. Collectively, the Bureau becomes an organisation dealing with classified information e.g. we refer to the Press Bureau that provides official information to the public. In the government a number of offices are so organised. They have rules for recruitment, training, promotion and termination of services. The person is separated from office and his powers are defined, as also those of the seniors and subordinates. There is the hierarchy of office and rules govern them, in their bases, they pass on papers or act or refuse to act. Merton has noted that the bureaucrat is a link between decision makers on the one hand and persons below the bureaucrat, and he acquires power because he can decide which papers may be forwarded or held back. But from Weber's

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point of view bureaucracy is a rational legal system and works that way. Bureaucracy is rationalised legal system and derives its legitimacy from it.

c) Charisma

The Persian (and Urdu) word *Karishma* is the root word that traveled to European languages almost is the same sense. *Karishma* or charisma indicates extra ordinary abilities of a person, and is used to describe the powers of a saint as well; something like a divine element, that sustains itself performing miracles. Its continuation depends upon its capacity to deliver goods. If a person's qualities do not remain effective, may be through age or infirmity, he/she loses the charisma. The legitimacy of charisma does not flow from tradition or rational bureaucracy. In fact the charismatic figure overrules both and introduces personal extra-ordinary performance as its own justification. Quite a few revolutionary personalities exercise such a power in the secular setting as well. Here Weber adds that a charismatic leader may come to power through extraordinary methods, but his continuation in power needs legitimacy either through a recourse to tradition or relational bureaucracy. That is how we find quite a few revolutionaries becoming conservatives an assuming power. After taking the three ways of legitimations of power together, we may point out that the modern democracies specialize in constitutional ways of acquiring or getting replaced in power position, mainly through the ballot, not the bullet. In fact the test of democracy is the smoothness of transfer of power through elections and the continuation of the political system. On this score the placement of countries on the human development index is counted and at least here India gets more favourable points than many of the Asian ad African countries, and a few Latin American countries as well.

Max Weber's formulation on power leads one to ask who has power on whom? If A commands B even against his will, A has power over B. In this as, A has positive power and B has negative power. Let us now think again — if A can exercise 4 commands over B, we may as well say A has + 4 units of power and B have -4. The sum total of power with A and B is + 4 — 4 = 0. This concept is called zero sum of power.

10.6 Talcott Parsons

Talcott Parsons translated a few works of Max Weber from German into English and made important contribution to the study of power and its functions for society. Here power is see as a necessary condition of maintaining a society, enabling it to realize a few collective goals of a society. In a modern society, functions are differentiated, and interrelated. The characteristics of a system are reproduced in subsystem. Polity is one of the subsystems. How it is organized and works is stated briefly. Functional approach does not mean absence of conflicts it in fact depicts the capacity of the system to deal with problems and solve them written its resources, you will thus get an idea of how in a modern society of differentiated institutions, each institution fulfills the needs of the society, each gets related to the others, and derives strength from others. This is the essence of functional approach. Power is seen through this perspective mainly through the manner in which famous sociologist Talcott Parsons clarifies issues keeping American Democracy on the center of attention. Some examples will be given from India to make a few points clearer.

Parsons has reexamined this position on two counts. Firstly, zero sum can happen as a special case. Generally, however, we come across cases where the gains and losses do not cancel out. A may issue 4 commands over B. B follows them, then on the future occasion it may happen that B gets his will carried out by A. In our daily life we come across such situation, when a son's will has to be carried out by the father or an officer has to agree with a subordinate clerk's opinion. In village life relation among the patron and client also follow such a course. In a Rajasthan village a drummer beats the drum to mark the close of a wedding ceremony. He stands firm and does not beat the drum. This is a tactic to make the patron pay the dues respectably. When the drummer is satisfied with proper payment, he sounds 'the last post'. A carpenter by tradition supplies a wooden board to decorate a welcome design. He keeps the entire proceedings halted until his rightful claim is accepted. Here, the public performance, or delay in performance, adds to the power of the otherwise lowly placed artisan. Examples can be multiplied to cover many rituals in pilgrim centres and other secular situations. One of the reasons for continuation of the jajmani relations has among others, been the capacity of the artisan or the serving group to exercise his 'vcto' as it were, on such chosen occasion, where the roles of domination are reversed. We are using these examples from our society to clarify that distribution of power that appears to have one direction from the high to the low can have the reverse flow as well. In such cases power equation could be +4 units for the patron and —4 with the serving group, yet on 2 other occasions the latter may wield the upper hand. Then the sum total of A's power could be +4 in favour and —2 in other cases; may be a zero sum case +4-4 and —2+2 = 0, yet if we add both that would be +4 for A and +2 for B. This is described as Non-zero sum power. Parsons asserts that non-zero sum is a normal feature, and if it happens that the becomes zero, that is a special case covered under the more general non-zero sum case.

The second aspect of power is that it be discussed not for individual cases, but for the total social systems, its needs and part played by different agencies in that regard. It will be helpful here to recall the functional requisites of a system and use the paradigm thus:

A stands for adaptation of the system to nature and   the environment. For the society as a whole this function is performed by Economy.

G stands for goal attainment, this means that the collective of the society are realized. The agency charged with this function is the Polity. Here the Polity acts on behalf of the society to realise the goals common to all.

I stands fort integration, society has different units with their own interests. At times may be in conflict with each other. There is a conflict theory which suggests that conflict is also a normal phenomenon in society. The functional point of view does not deny this proposition but it asserts that the social

system, if it exists, has to have a mechanism or capacity to resolve these conflicts. The term 'conflicts resolution' precisely states that process. In a modern society, the legal system tries to perform this role. The contesting parties put forward their claims and counter claims, and the judiciary settles the case. So long as this mode works, we say 'integration' is maintained in the system. In the field of games and sports, there is intense competition, we have laws of the game, and a referee or an umpire to give decisions that have to be accepted by both the parties. There may be a few disappointments, yet so long as the decision makers role is duly accepted, we say that the system works or exists.

L refers to latency or pattern maintenance. They define the basis for making laws in terms of or in consonance with the values of the society. There have been societies where birth or order of birth qualified a person to become the prince or the chief. Such societies were based on the principal of **ascription**. Modern democratic societies insist on **achievements** as the basis for gaining status. In the past religion provided the justification for status allocation. In the new situation secular values of achievement are considered valuable. In case of modern democracies e.g. the preamble to the constitution of India specifies such values which are common knowledge — yes, you guess correctly: these are liberty, equality, fraternity etc. you can fill in the rest.

The four aspects of a system are arranged in a specific order. Adaptation is related to boundary maintenance of the system, helps define the place of the system with regard to other systems and determine where it stands. Society has to define its relation with external environment, nature and its resources. Economy acts as an organized efforts to make use of those resources and energies. In this sense economy is treated as a sub-system. Analysis of economy as a subsystem was undertaken by Neil J. Smelser in collaboration with Parsons. Smelser had studied economics in the U.K. and when he joined Parsons at Harvard in the U.S.A., economy began to be linked to social systems. The two great authors thus produced the major work *Economy and Society* (1956).

Box 10.2: Parsons and Mills

A few years later Parsons wrote another work under the title *structure and process in modern societies* (1960). Parsons by that time had had begun to write in a simpler language to a writer had been hired for him to put his ideas in simpler form, Parsons gave a lecture based on that book at the University of Berkeley where smelser had started teaching. I was present at that time, After the lecture students talked among themselves Look, I could understand what Parsons said'!; the other said' but what was new in it!'

I had read comments on that book given by the authors of *Power Elite*' C. Wright Mills, and brought the same to his notice. Parsons vigorously maintained his position, and pointed out that defects indicated by the critics of American democracy were unfounded. The American judiciary (system) was strong, and could take care of cases of violation of the democratic procedure. This anecdote serves one more purpose : it emphasises how Parsons considered the system as a going comcern - that is a system that was active and vigorous; secondly that it had the capacity to take care of mistakes, and finally that the people had faith in the judiciary. These views clarify how a system exists against those of critics who say that the system does not exist, hence any approach for studying it was itself mistakes.

We may now summarize the points that make functional analysis possible:

- A social system exists and is capable of handling conflicts within it.

- A social system consists of parts.

- The parts are active and through their activity contribute to the maintenance and continuation of the system.

- The system has a tenure and working longer than the life of the incumbents to positions and the life span of a generation.

- The method of studying parts of a system, their interrelations and contribution for the maintenance of the system is characterised as functional approach.

- The basis for functional analysis was laid by spencer. Durkheim, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. For more details, see earlier units in analysing modern societies through this approach we recall the names of Parsons and Merton who are referred to by some analysis as neo-functionalists. Malinowski and Raddiffe-Brawn had basically studied the primitive societies. Durkheim had used this approach along with two others—the evolutionary and explanatory in terms of comparative approach. Merton had extended the ideas to modern societies and coined phrases like function and dysfunction, manifest and latent functions and related these to the study of anomie in which he discussed the inter relations of goals and means. Parsons was associated with the study of social system. His main points have been briefly pointed in this unit in the AGIL paradigm and functional requisites of the system. This approach has been further extended to each part like economy, polity and religion by various writers.

- Power as a concept belongs to the area of polity. The functional analysis of power treats it at two levels;

i) Who has power over whom? The sum is zero. This is a traditional answer. In the other hand the functional approach to power treats it as a non-zero sum, which as a special case may also be a zero-sum, that is the zero-sum is included in the more comprehensive case of non-zero sum.

ii) Power is the generalised capacity of a system to realise its collective goals. This approach goes beyond the competitive aspect of power over some one else. Functional approach treats power of the system, not merely struggle for power within a system. The power of the system can grow and enable the system both to continue and strengthen itself. In this sense again the power of the system is not a zero-sum concept, but one that keeps on adding to its capacity to face collective challenges.

10.7 Polity as a Subsystem

Now, we shall turn to the analysis of polity as a sub system of society. Such academic exercises have their parallel in India. When, we study caste in India, we also refer to sub-castes and are reminded of G.S. Ghurye's famous statement 'sub-caste is the real caste' Later Indian and American sociologists began using the indigenous term jati to refer to sub-castes. Our main concern here is how a system and a sub-system are analyzed at a general level. Does the sub-system behave like a system? Parsons and Smalser agree, say: yes, thus economy is a sub-system; polity is a sub-system they act that way, what does this mean? We shall see next.

Higher Level and Generality

Diagram : Political complex

	Means : Regulation	Goal specification : Authority	
A			G
L	Values : organisational effectiveness	Primary Norms : Leadership	I

Each of the four reveal internal characters of a sub-system — for example Authority in second cell (g):

Lower Level and Generality (Authority)

Allocation of budgetary resources	Allocation of organisational responsibilities
Valuations of control of membership contributions	General powers of making bonding decision

The other 3- regulations, leadership and valuation are similarly grouped in other diagram by Parsons. Ref.: (Parsons 1960: 167-168.)

A sub system reproduces the characteristics of a system and acquires its properties. We have referred to the case of a caste, likewise in a family cycle, a joint family gets the shape of several nuclear families on the death of a father as his two or four sons set up their own units. Later they beget sons, who get married and the household again becomes joint the addition of children confirms if further. The sons of one generation become parents in the next and grand parents for the third generation. Such tendencies are seen in plenty in rural areas. In the process of growth of an economy, a company or a bank may set up a branch office, which soon acquires the status of a full unit. In the educational sphere in Punjab and neighbouring states, we a university opening a new campus, which for all purposes becomes an autonomous unit. In the sphere of polity, we see a federal (central) government, many state governments, and a few union territories. All of them are cases of representative government with some differences in power distribution. Next steps through decentralization carry forward this pattern to district, panchayat samitis and village panchayat. At all these levels in varying degrees, exercise of power has to be functional for the units concerned and if the system has to continue, the four requisites have to be attended to recall the four as AGIL.

1) Each political unit has to define its boundaries and get adapted to external situations. It has its natural and other resources to be used for the common good.

2) The common goals are attended to through the polity. Thus there are rules of governance that spell out who gets what and how if there is a dispute or a conflict.

Problems like anomie, bureaucracy, relative deprivation have been examined in the context of accepted values and alternate means for satisfying them by Merton (1968).

The agency for resolving the conflict is activated. Finally, agencies act is accordance with the value patterns of the system — for example education, health for all, as reflection of the rights of all citizens. These functions have to be performed by every sub system of the polity — in the Indian case by the central (federal) government, the states, Zila Parishads and Municipal governments, the Panchayat Samiti and the Gram Panchayat. Details will be different, the scope too varied, yet the functional requirements will have to be attended to. This example clarifies how a sub-system reproduces the characteristics of a system and at each level our understanding of the way these requirements are met proceeds along functional analysis of the system (sub system).

Parsons had analysed political process involved in the American democracy. It needs be emphasized that the functional approach takes note of conflicts in power; is fact as Coser pointed out there is a function of social conflict. What does this mean? It suggests that when a conflict occurs say between two political parties that are in power in different states or the party at the state level is different from the one at the centre, such a difference promotes a competition among the parties to do better than other. Secondly, the conflict leads to assertion of one's rights against the other, and shows how both the opposing parties are actively involved in maintaining the system from which each derives its legitimacy. The goals are enshrined in the Constitution, powers too defined and in its exercise the little vigilance on the part of each promotes the total solidarity. The generality and its strength grows through this conflict, or competition.

In the context of the two contending parties or two combinations of parties, the situation of a conflict leads to internal solidarity of the otherwise disparate sub-groups, thereby creating a functional unity among them to fight for a common cause. The definition of a common adversary leads to a process of integration within a society or groups so obliged.

10.8 Conclusion

Normally, functional approach is considered also be most suitable for the undertaking the study of simpler society. Merton brought forth a fresh paradigm of functional studies to cover problems of industrial societies at the middle level. At the macro level the most generalized in scope as a 'grand theory' Parsons extends the approach to the study of modern societies marked by increasing differentiation among institutions. Polity, like economy is seen fulfilling the needs of society. Polity represents collective organisation of society for attaining common goals and the product is power. It is a non zero-sum concept. It is exercised through authorisation by a legitimated leadership and is used to minimize dissent, exercise control and realise common goals. In a modern society like the USA, power in combination with a strong legal system and economy derives strength from the value system of success through competition i.e. achievement not by ascription, birth or tradition (leadership and authority basically reflect bureaucratic legal processes combined with bits of charlsmatic effect, though the office is separated from the individual who holds it). In turn these aspects strengthen one another and the social system persists. Problems arise but are seen in the total systems perspective.

10.9 Further Reading

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Unit 11
Power and Institutions

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand

- concept of power and related concepts

- the various institutions of power and its uses

- instruments of power

- sources of power

- contexts of use of power

11.1 Introduction

Social power is a universal phenomenon in human societies and social relationships. It is possessed by both individuals and social groups. It is, in fact, the basic common element in all social relationships, politics and economics. Social power is generally experienced in an unbalanced situation. These power imbalances are the root causes of most of the social problems.

Power can be understood in two main ways. One way of understanding power that has gained prominence in recent academic discussion is the *idea of power* as a simple quantitative phenomenon. This type of conception of power pins at a kind of generalised capacity to act. The approach considers power as enhancing the capacities of those who possess it, and thereby impinges to those persons who do not possess as an imposition on their freedom and liberty. The writings of Hobbes, Locke *inter alia* on the discourse of power may be considered under this general approach.

The other and more complex conception of power is that power which involves both *capacity* and a *right to act* which derives from the consent of those over whom power is exercised. This approach looks at the effects of power as generally identified by reference to 'counterfactual conditions'. In other words, the approach holds that power in the hands of others prevents its victims from doing what they otherwise would have attained, or 'even from thinking what they otherwise would have thought'. Foucault's analysis of power is a good representative (Foucault et al 1980) of this approach. This second conception of power is often implicit rather than explicit. The concept is central to much modern social and political thought today.

Power has also been viewed in various ways. Some scholars (Mills 1959) would consider power as a 'zero-sum' concept. Here, power is defined in a mutually exclusive manner. The concept would mean that if one person or party wins, the other necessarily loses. In other words, the approach conceives power

as to be possessed by only one person or group in such a way that a second person or group over whom power is wielded does not possess. There are others who opine that power should be looked at as a kind of a 'non-zero-sum' concept (Parsons 1961). According to them, each person or party shares power to the extent that both the parties ('share-holders') gains. In this approach, power is defined in terms of mutually inclusive objectives.

Thus, social power is defined in different ways. However, for our purpose, we generally define power as the ability of an individual or group to carry out its wishes or policies to control, manipulate, or influence the behaviour of others, whether they wish to cooperate or not. Social power is also the capability to influence others or resist influence from others. The agent who possesses power has resources to force his/her will on others. People with great wealth, muscle, status, intelligence, competence, etc. have more chances to influence other people.

Power has been invariably used as synonyms for the closely related concepts, such as, prestige, influence, eminence, competence, ability, knowledge, dominance, rights, force, coercion, authority among others. But they are not identical concepts *per se*. We shall therefore examine the differences of these terms.

Let us first of all differentiate between the independent variables of power and prestige. The relationship of the two terms may be understood in a way that power can occur without prestige while prestige would not occur without power. For instance, a scientist would have prestige but no power; whereas, a policeman would have power, but little prestige. In the same way, we could establish relationship between power and closely related terms such as competence, ability, knowledge, eminence and so on. These concepts can be accompanied or may not be accompanied by power.

The concept of power is very closely related to the concept of dominance. Basically, power is in essence a sociological concept whereas dominance is a socio-psychological concept. In other words, power is located in groups and it manifests in inter-group relations, whereas dominance is essentially located in the individual and it is expressed in inter-personal relationships. Again, power manifests in the statuses that people occupy in formal organisation, whereas dominance appears in the roles people play in informal organisation. Power is a function of organisation of associations, of the arrangement and juxtaposition of groups, and of the structure of society itself. On the contrary, dominance is a function of personality or temperament; it is a personal trait (Bierstedt, 1969). However, this distinction in terms of sociological and psychological discourses, and also group vis-à-vis personality need not be in a strict sense. Because nowadays, we often talk about collective dominance and hegemony and so much so, we also talk of power relations even in the inter-personal levels.

Likewise power and influence may be distinguished by an important feature, viz., power is by and large coercive, whereas influence is persuasive. In this context, we could consider that Karl Marx, the philosopher has a great influence exerted upon the 20th century; but he was not a powerful man. In almost the same manner, right, like privilege, is not power itself, but one of the perquisites of power. But then we can pose the question as whether force and authority are power? The answer would be that they are not, even though they are very closely related terms. In a simplistic way, then, we may

distinguish them by mainly considering that power is a latent force; force is manifest power; and authority is institutionalised power (Hindess, 1996). Power is potential, so that when it is used, it becomes either force or authority. For example, the threat of a minority to withdraw from an association would effectively wield power, but once the minority group withdraws from the association, it is no longer power, but force.

11.2 Instruments of Power

There are three main institutions or traits that accord the right to use of power. In other words, there are three instruments for wielding or enforcing of power. They are *coercive* or *condign*, *compensatory* and *conditioned* power. These three instruments need not be strictly compartmentalised. They overlap each other at one point of time or another. We shall deal with them in brief before we get on to other aspects of power.

Coercive or *condign power* wins acceptance by threatening, intimidating and/or inflicting on others with dire consequences. It includes power exercised by any form of adverse action or its threat in the form of fines, resource or property expropriation, rebuke, and condemnation by any individuals or the community concerned. The process of such power takes place in a situation where power is gained by attaining submission from others to abandon their preferences or desires through the capacity to impose an alternative to those preferences of the individual or group that are unpleasant or painful.

We could understand coercive power in two levels: First, a situation where a person or a group who undergo a very painful experience would still opt for the *defacto* condition as the alternative provided appear to be either no better or even worse than what they have been experiencing at a given point of time; Second, a situation where the individual or group withdraws from acting against certain impositions or refrains from speaking his/her mind and opts to submit to the view of others in order to avoid unpleasant implications. In other words, the person or group just accepts the dictat of others and would not speak up because of the impending rebuke and harsh consequences that would come upon him/her or them.

Box 11.1: Comparing Condign and Compensatory Power

The most distinctive feature of both condign and compensatory power is their objectivity- or visibility. Those accepting the will of others are conscious of doing so; they are acting in consequence of a fairly deliberate calculation that is the better course of action. It has become so because of the offer of some specific quid pro quo for their submission. Those exercising the power are also purposefully aware of what they are doing.

The difference between condign and compensatory power is the difference between negative and affirmative reward. Condign power threatens the individual with something physically or emotionally painful enough so that he forgoes pursuit of his own will or preference in order to avoid it. Compensatory power offers the individual a reward or payment sufficiently advantageous or agreeable so that he (or she) forgoes pursuit of his own preferences to seek the reward instead. In less abstract language, condign power wins submission by the promise or reality of punishment; compensatory power wins submission by the promise or reality of benefit.
Source: Galbraith, 1984.

Compensatory power attains submission from others by offering affirmative action in the form of rewards to the individual or group who submits to the coercion. In economic terms, compensation in rural areas could be in various forms, such as, payments in kind or cash for services rendered, the right to work a plot of land, or sharing the product of the landlord's fields. In socio-economic and political sense, the affirmative rewards, be it, economic package for development *inter alia* provided to certain communities or regions infested with socio-political unrest could be another example of compensatory power in the modern situation.

In the above two cases, viz., coercive power and compensatory power, the individual or group is aware of his/her submission to the coercing agent through compulsion and persuasion and/or inducement respectively.

Reflection and Action 11.1

How would you define power? Can you differentiate power from dominance, prestige and influence?

The third instrument of power- *conditioned power* in contrast to condign and compensatory power (which is visible and objective) is subjective. In this case, neither those exercising the power nor those who are subject to it, need not necessarily be aware of its exertion. This kind of power is achieved by changing the attitude and belief of the individual or group. In this situation, a person or group accepts the will of another or others because they feel that the initiative taken seems to be right, by way of persuasion, education, social commitment, or promises. They submit to the initiative because they feel that it is in a preferred course or track. In such situation, submission is not necessarily acknowledged. Conditioned power is, in fact, the most crucial and pervasive kind of power to the functioning of modern society, whether it be in the aspects of economy and polity, and in capitalist and socialist countries as well.

11.3 Sources of Power

There are several sources or institutions of power. These sources or institutions of power differentiate those who wield power on others from those who submit to them. Scholars have identified different sources of power according to their perceptions. For instance, Bierstedt (1969) identifies three sources of power, namely, numbers of people, social organization, and resources. He includes various components in the third source of power, such as, money, property, prestige, knowledge, competence, deceit, fraud, secrecy, and natural resources. Mann (1986) would identify four sources of power, namely, ideological, economic, military, and political relationships. Tumin (1992) opines that there are five sources of power, namely, role-specific authority, goods and services, skills and abilities, personal qualities, and coercive power. Galbraith (1984) classifies three sources of power-personality, property and organisation. There are also many other scholars who classify them in many different ways. Therefore, it is difficult to follow one single classification of the sources of power. But all of these classifications have more or less similar elements of the sources of power. For our purpose, we shall consider the following main sources of power: *personality*, *numbers of people*, *resources or property*, *skills abilities and knowledge*, *media*, *coercive force*, *and organisation*.

Personality or leadership is the quality of physique, mind, speech, morality,

competence and other personal traits that enables a person to have access to the instruments of power. Personality also means personal qualities such as beauty, charm, or charisma that paves way to persuade others to get one's favour. In modern times, personality has its primary association with conditioned power, viz., the ability to persuade or change the attitude and belief of others.

Numbers of people is yet another important source of power. In other words, majorities constitute a residual locus of social power. Given the same organisation and the same resources *inter alia*, the larger number can always control the smaller and obtain its compliance. We can see the number game of power in various contexts. In simple societies, the access to power was usually through physical strength and coercion. Families with large youths and muscular males would have advantage of wielding power on others. In other words, the muscular male youths in these families would be great sources of power. This does not, however, mean that diplomacy and intelligence does not work in these societies. There are many instances where intelligent people wield powers in the simple societies.

In the modern societies, we can also understand the number factor of power as seen in elections of all kinds, where the majority is given the right to institutionalise its power as authority. This kind of power is observed in all associations, be it democratic, autocratic, or otherwise. The power of a majority as found in both formal and informal associations is beyond doubt the key to either threat or sustaining the stability of the association concerned.

Skills and abilities is one source of power which enables people to provide services that others need or desire. These skills could be in terms of craft skills, military acumen, economic expertise, medical knowledge, and literary artistry. It also includes knowledge and media power, among others. These skills give the possessors the advantage to have power over those who desire the benefits of their skills and expertise. Knowledge becomes power because it is an asset to comprehend circumstances, to predict and plan, and to create effects, especially by knowing how to use other forms of power.

Media in the modern world has become one of the great sources of power. Its contribution is most significantly manifested in influencing or controlling information and communication by having access to the media and through controlling and manipulation. For example, the projections that the columnists make in the print media or television reporters on important but controversial and important issues have great impacts on the readers and viewers.

Resources or Property is one of the important attributes to wield power. Resources may be of many kinds. It includes property, money, prestige, knowledge, competence, skills and abilities, deceit, fraud, secrecy and all the things pertaining to natural and also supernatural resources. In the later case (viz., supernatural resources), we can understand of religious associations which, as agencies of a celestial government, apply supernatural sanctions as instruments of control. A wealthy person commands respect and authority. In the process of its activities, a wealthy person can attain conditioned submission by way of submission or otherwise. The possession of goods and services enables the possessors to purchase and acquire what they want.

However, property-wealth, income, etc. is mainly associated with compensatory power.

In c*oercive force,* power is derived from coercion, be it, psychological, social, or physical that one possesses. Through this coercive force, the possessor of the force can threaten others to submission and carry out one's intention and objective. People out of fear for torture or any kind of punishment—physically, mentally, or otherwise, and the fear of the loss of their freedom and resources yields to the force. They thus become victims of coercion. These threats could be real or imaginary perception.

Organisation is said to be the most important source of power in modern societies. A well organised and disciplined body of army or police can control a much larger number of unorganised majority. In many instances, we also experience an organised minority control an unorganised majority. This simply speaks largely of the power of organisation. Organisation is associated with all the three instruments of power, namely, conditioned power, coercive power, and compensatory power.

Reflection and Action 11.2

What are the sources of power? Describe at least four sources.

Role specific authority is also an important component of organisation power by virtue of the authority sanctioned by the organisation or position that one holds. For instance, the president of an organisation has the power or authority of the office. Similarly, power is also possessed by judges, police, employers, teachers and others in a formal relationship in which one partner has the legal or customary right to command or control some or all aspects of the relationship. These powers may be seen within the limits of the formal relationship. It is specific to the status relationships one is associated.

An organisation usually has the ability to persuade others towards realisation of their objectives. Organisation has also the access to coercive or condign power like in the case of the state. The kind of access of an organisation to compensatory power would however depend on the quantity and value of the property it possesses.

Box 11.2: Distinguishing Legitimate and Illegitimate Sources and Uses

Legitimate and acceptable powers must be distinguished from those that are deemed illegitimate and unacceptable. Yet all illegitimate powers rest on the same bases as those which yield legitimate power. Gangsters, thieves, terrorists, prostitutes, gamblers, and others in the illegitimate world are able to exert power because of their role-specific authorities in that world, or because of their material resources, skills, personal qualities, and psychological and physical coerciveness. Moreover, those who secure resources from the illegitimate world, that is, money from stealing, gambling, or drug peddling, can use such illegally acquired assets as a source of power in both the legitimate and illegitimate world. Money secured in legitimate ways, such as through work, can be used for either legitimate or illegitimate ends, such as to purchase illegal drugs or to gamble illegally, or to secure a position or contract through bribery. In the same vein, a person with superior role authority can use the power of his position, such as the ability to fire another person, to coerce the subordinate, illegally, into desired forms of behavior.

Source: Tumin, 1992.

The sources of power would also have quite a number of combinations among and between them. They also include both legitimate and illegitimate sources of power (Talcott Parsons et al, 1967). They are also combined in various strengths. Due to the variation of combinations, varied results are also yielded for enforcement of power.

11.4 Contexts of Power

There are four main contexts where power can be exercised. They may be seen in the contexts of *political affairs*, *institutional patterning*, *ensuring life chances*, and *personal relations (Tumin, 1992)*.

In the milieu of *political affairs*, it is essential to set the structure and mechanism of the affairs and conduct of political communities, such as towns, cities, states, nations and/or international community. In this context, power has bearing with both realms of individuals and groups. The groups would include associations, political parties, whole communities, *inter alia*. Such collectivities derive power mainly from their positional roles. For instance, we have a situation where the federal governments have more powers than the local governments as provided by the constitution of the respective states. In the context of the Indian state, the Union government has greater powers than its federal states.

Institutional Patterning is also an important context of power appropriation. Power is relevant in the interplay of roles in the basic institutions, such as the family, polity, the educational system, religious institutions and the economy. In these institutions, we find some kind of relations, be it between employers and employees, teachers and pupils, priests and laymen and so on. Even in our everyday life, we all have some position and role in these basic institutions which govern our life. Because of our involvement in such relationships, we do experience differential power relations, the patterns of dominance and submission which are important elements in determining the pattern of conduct. In such patterning of institutions, role-specific authority is a crucial component and role-player.

Power is also exercised in *ensuring life chances* in one's life. It operates in the competition for share of valued life chances. It could be in terms of the chance for surviving the first year of life, maintaining good health, securing good opportunities for schooling and jobs, and living a reasonable long life span. These valued life chances are important factors to control one's destiny because they are contributory attributes for enhancing one's position and role and the ability to shape and control one's future.

Reflection and Action 11.3

Discuss the various contexts in which power is exercised.

Personal relations outside the purview of the institutional roles are relevant to the appropriation of power. These relations could be of many forms and would take place at different situations. We meet people in the market, in stores, on the street, in buses, sub-ways, trains, planes, parks, stadiums, seminars and conferences. We do make friendships and love relationships at one time or the other. We also meet people in the neighbourhood and other people who are not formally bound to us. But we know with whom we must network with for realizing our interests, desires and movements. All these

relationships are good examples where power plays important role in personal relations.

We also have situation where people are attracted and so won their friendship through one's personal charm and beauty. The same quality can influence other people in winning their love and confidence. These situations are some of the instances where power works through personal relations.

All these powers discussed above are not equally relevant nor are they relevant at all situations. But one or more of these forms of power will be relevant in all the four contexts of power.

Box 11.3: Measurement of Amount of Power

The amount of power exercised by an individual may be measured either by the ratio of his successful power acts to all of his attempted power acts or by certain criteria …. These measures may be used as a basis of comparison between different power-holders. The two "amounts" represent not alternative techniques of measurement but differences in what is measured. Amount in these cases does not mean the same thing. Most investigations of power, in so far as they deal with the amount of power, utilise "amount" in the second sense.

Two principal criteria may be used to measure the amount of power exercised by a power-holder: the number of actions of any given person in each of any number of selected types of behavior, over which control is realised (or potential); and the number of persons so controlled. The definition of dictatorship as "a form of government where everything that is not forbidden is obligatory" indicates complete power in terms of the spheres of behavior over which control is exercised.

Source: Goldhamer and Shils, 1969.

There is no necessary relationship either of the amounts of power of an individual or group in one context and their power in the others. A person may be very powerful in one context and may be powerless in quite the other. For instance, a person may be powerful in the family, but he may be a subject to the will of everyone outside the family. Likewise, one may be powerful in national affairs and yet be relatively powerless in personal relationships.

11.5 Conclusion

Social power is a universal phenomenon that transcends all human societies. It is experienced in everyday social relationships in one way or another. Power may manifest as a generalised capacity to act and/or as involving both capacity and a right to act. Generally, power may be understood as the ability of an individual or group to carry out its wishes or policies to control, manipulate, or influence the behaviour of others, whether they wish to cooperate or not.

Social power is also the capability to influence others or resist influence from others. The concept of power is often considered as synonymous to its closely related concepts such as dominance, prestige, influence, force and so on. But they are not the same.

There are three main institutions (instruments) for enforcing power. They are coercive or condign, compensatory and conditioned power. These three instruments are however not strictly compartmentalised. Again, there are several sources of power such as personality, numbers of people, resources or property, skills, abilities and knowledge, media, coercive force, and organisation.

Power is manifest in various contexts, be it political affairs, institutional patterning, ensuring life chances, or personal relations. The amounts of power of an individual or group are not necessarily the same for different contexts. A person may be powerful in one context and may be powerless in another.

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Unit 12
Power/Knowledge

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit you should be able to

▫   define and discuss power

▫   discuss the relationship of power/knowledge

▫   outline what is Foucault's Archeology and Genealogy

12.1 Introduction

Sociologists usually define power as the ability to impose one's will on others, even if those others resist in some way. "By power is meant that opportunity existing within a social relationship which permits one to carry out one's own will even against resistance and regardless of the basis on which this opportunity rests"(Max Weber, Basic Concepts in Sociology). Power manifests itself in a relational manner. That is, one cannot meaningfully say that a particular social actor 'has power' without also specifying the other parties to the social relationships. Also power almost always operates reciprocally, but usually not equally reciprocally.

The understanding and analysis of power has been critical to sociological thought. One of the prominent delineations of power has been provided by Michel Foucault (1926-1984). His works analyse the link between power and knowledge. Foucault began his intellectual pursuits in philosophy but became disillusioned by its abstractions and "naive truth claims" and turned to psychology and psychopathology. This resulted in his early writings, 'Madness and Civilisation', 'The Birth of Clinic' and initiated his lifelong interest in the relationship between power and knowledge.

The main influences on Foucault's thought were German philosophers Frederick Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Nietzsche contended that truth, knowledge and power are inextricably associated. He maintained that human behavior is motivated by a will to power and that traditional values had lost their power over society. Heidegger criticized what he called 'our current technological understanding of being'. Foucault's thought explored the shifting patterns of power within a society and the ways in which power relates to the self. He investigated the changing rules governing the kind of claims that could be taken seriously as true or false at different times in history. He also studied how everyday practices enabled people to define their identities and systematize knowledge; events may be understood as being produced

by nature, by human effort or by God. Foucault argued that each way of understanding things had its advantages and its dangers.

12.2 Definition of Power

Foucault never attempts at any definition of power but gives a definition of power relations at best. "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individuals or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others. Which is to say, of course, that something called power with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist."

Foucault goes on to insist that knowledge and power are always and necessarily interdependent. A site where power is enforced is also a site where knowledge is produced and conversely, a site from which knowledge is derived is a place where power is exercised. In 'Discipline and Punish' he sees prison as an example of just such a site of power, and as a place where knowledge, essential to the modern social sciences, was formed. Reciprocally the ideas from which the social sciences were formulated were also the ones that gave birth to the prison. The belief that a scientist can arrive at an objective conclusion, Foucault argues, is one of the greatest fallacies of the modern, humanist era.

> "Modern humanism is therefore mistaken in drawing this line between knowledge and Power. Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time where knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge. It is impossible for knowledge not to endanger power."

So instead of referring to power and knowledge separately, he prefers to compound the term **power/knowledge.**

Box 12.1

The concept of "discourse" is central to many of Foucault's ideas. He describes discourses as ways of identifying truth and knowledge at historically specific moments, thus providing set of rules that define realities.

This is especially pertinent to scientific discourses, which are legitimated by the rationality paradigm. Discourses contain power because they establish particular truths and knowledge, and their power is exercised through the creation and sustenance of social norms, practices and institutions. In Foucauldian analysis, power is not monopolised by any one subject through its control of a predominant discourse; the discursive field comprises multiple subjects who manipulate various discourses to some extent. For Foucault, the issue is not origin of discourses, but the implications of their power effects and the types of knowledge they produce and institutionalise. Since power originates in discourses, it has no unitary source but is heterogeneous and pluralistic, coming from everywhere and being everywhere.

12.3 Power Knowledge and Discourse

Foucault analyses the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse that develops from the establishment of Enlightenment rationality which

presents itself as progressive and emancipatory. The hegemony of Enlightenment rationality and its institutions, and the marginalisation of other discourses, create and validate a social network of normative power which disciplines and constrains the individual at the micro level. Foucault studies the emergence of several kinds of rationalities in history. The emergence of a particular kind of rationality, then, presupposes that the field of knowledge is tightly linked with an empirical field. Due to its instrumentality, a form of reason as well as any form of knowledge define a set of possible practices and is thus an instrument of power. Further, being embodied in an empirical field, a form of reason (or any form of knowledge supported by it) has no 'being' beyond any set of practices. Therefore, the field of knowledge defines a field of power and vice-versa.

Power, thus, is not to be considered as opposite to reason; but on the contrary as the necessary condition for the construction of knowledge. Moreover, because power produces knowledge, it can be, at least partially, grasped by archaeology.

Reflection and Action 12.1

What is the relationship between power/knowledge. Does one always imply the other? Discuss and write down your answer in a note book.

Foucault's discussion of the nature of modern power is located within the postmodern framework. In keeping with the postmodern perspective, he critiques modernity and the universalising claims of modern rationality, and emphasises multiplicity, discontinuity and fragmentation. Foucault calls for a "theoretical production" (Foucault 1980:81) which is independent, localised and free from traditional discourse, such as his own application of the differing but overlapping perspectives of psychology, medicine, criminology and sexuality in his exploration of modernity.

The two major approaches employed by Foucault in his analysis of power and knowledge were **Archaeology** and **Genealogy.** His aim is to establish a genealogy of how power is exercised in our own society basing his analysis on archaeology of the discursive formations. Hence, his analysis is aimed towards the 'modes of functioning' of power in our society.

12.4 Foucault's Archeological Writings

Foucault's early work provides an archaeology of knowledge, wherein he deconstructs the underlying unconscious rationalities of historically specific domains. In his first major work, Madness and Civilisation (original French edition 1961; English edition 1965), Foucault traces the evolution of the relationship between insanity and modern reason. He examines the historical and discursive process whereby insanity is constructed as the opposite of rationality and is systematically separated from reason through "discourses of exclusion and institutions of confinement".

Box 12.2

According to Foucault, the "scientific psychiatry" (Foucault1965:158) that emerged in the nineteenth century was invested with morality, and the scientific treatment of the insane was to occur through confinement. For Foucault, the power mechanisms involved in the process were more repressive than the shackles of the past.

Foucault's most elaborate archaeological exposition occurs in his following book, The Order of Things (original French edition 1966), in which he describes the emergence of the human and social sciences as the product of "the underlying rules, assumptions and ordering procedures of the Renaissance, classical, and modern eras" (Best and Kellner 1991:41), and the creation of "man" as a discursive construct of scientific knowledge and inquiry. In his final archaeological writing, The Archaeology of Knowledge (original French edition 1971), Foucault provides a reflexive critique and clarification of his intellectual project: the development of a historical and theoretical epistemological space.

Foucault's archaeological writings have been criticized for an excessive focus on discourse, to the exclusion of social institutions and practice. Nevertheless, Foucault's archaeologies clearly privilege the analysis of theory and knowledge over social practices and institutions. An inquiry into the effect of discourse on the social and political environment would require an evaluation of material institutions. This principle guides Foucault's next intellectual phase, in which he borrows from the Nietzschean principle of genealogy to concentrate explicitly on power effects and their relationship with knowledge (Best and Kellner 1991:45).

12.5 Foucault's Genealogical Writings

Genealogy signals a shift and broadening of Foucault's focus, but not a fundamental change in his vision. Like Foucault's archaeological writings, his genealogy explores discursive discontinuities and clarifies the historical contexts of positions which are presented as absolute. Following from archaeology, genealogy focuses on the multiplicities and pluralities within a field of discourse; explicates the shifting, discontinuous undercurrents of evolutionary history; and examines the role of reason in the production of the human sciences. In contrast to archeology, genealogy aims at social, political and economic institutions and practices; and the relations between discursive and non-discursive domains.

Following from this position, Foucault began to theorize about power in the 1970s from a non-totalizing, non-subjective and non-humanist perspective. His conception of power is radically different from earlier juridical, political and economic macro perspectives. He suggests that power cannot be observed in these apparatuses, and that it is diffuse, non specific and polymorphous, shaping individual identities and bodies. Thus, unlike most earlier explanations, he does not see power as inhibiting and negative, but as productive and prescriptive, operating through the authority of social norms (Best & Kellner 1991:48-49).

Reflection and Action 12.2

Reflect on Foucault's genealogical approach. What are the advantages of such an approach?

In his first genealogical work, Discipline and Punish (original French edition 1975; English edition 1979), Foucault describes "the historical formation of the soul, body, and subject" within "disciplinary matrices of power" which operate in schools, armies, hospitals, factories and prisons. He thus examines the relationship between modern social institutions and the power relations of rationality. In his later work, Foucault explicates the nature of rational power.

Foucault critiques the 'repressive hypothesis' by stating that the idea of sexual repression is a mechanism situated within "the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure" (Foucault 1978:11), which creates and sustains the discourse on sexuality and focuses on the body as the site of control. Thus, Foucault reveals the ubiquitous and insidious operations of power; problematizes rationality, subjectivity and knowledge; explores the links between power and knowledge. Foucault's vision has often been considered oppressive. His archaeological and genealogical works reveal the colonizing power of modern rationality and its dispersed presence throughout the social field.

Nonetheless, Foucault's theorising is grounded in the belief that knowledge can be transformative. At the same time, although discourses reinforce power, they also provide potential for resistance, whereby the disenfranchised can extend oppositional discourses and demand legitimacy, frequently by appropriating institutional categories.

12.6 Conclusion

Even if one does not agree with Foucault, at the very least, he reveals the pervasive presence of power in human existence and critiques the demonstrated validity of rationality, subjectivity and knowledge. His analyses describe the extensive effects of power and its multiple operations: in rational institutions such as schools, hospitals, factories, asylums and prisons; in the production of scientific knowledge; and in the construction of epistemological systems (Best and Kellner 1991:68-69). However, Foucault also has clear limitations. His critique of modernity has been accused of being one-sided, presenting only the negative results of rationality, which limits his applicability. More significant is the startling neutrality of his analyses. Although Foucault states that power operates through knowledge and discourse, he ignores the reality that established epistemologies favor certain groups or individuals to the exclusion of others. The discourse of rationality itself has historically specific roots to white Western male intellectuals: thus, its predominance has very real and specific effects. Although he speaks of bringing subjected discourses into play, he does not address the fact that subjected discourses are discovered among clearly identifiable sections of the human population: among non-white, non-affluent, non-West European, non-heterosexual men and women.

In spite of practical goals of his analysis, Foucault has been broadly criticized by his adversaries on the ' backdoor determinism' inherent to his conception of power.

However Foucault has made an invaluable contribution to the study of power/knowledge by opening new fields of understanding and interpretation.

12.7 Further Reading

Foucault Michel, 1973. *Birth of the Clinic* N.4. Pantheon

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Foucault Michel, 1965. *Madness and Civilization* N.4. Pantheon

Unit 13
Evolution, Development and Function of Capitalism

Contents

Learning Objectives

This unit is aimed at contributing towards an understanding of

- the evolution, development and function of Capitalism
- also provide different theoretical standpoints on Capitalism through historical writings

13.1 Introduction

Capitalism was used by economists in a purely technical sense to refer to the use of methods of production, and has been largely associated with a particular view of the nature of capital. This definition of capitalism has no reference to the way in which the instruments of production are owned. It refers only to their economic origin and the extent of their use. According to another conception, capitalism is identified with a system of unfettered individual enterprise. That is a system where economic and social relations are ruled by contract, where men are free agents in seeking their livelihood, and where legal compulsions and restrictions are absent. Thereby capitalism is made virtually synonymous with a regime of laissez-faire or free competition.

13.2 Historical Interpretations of Capitalism

Broadly speaking, historical research and historical interpretation have influenced three separate meanings assigned to the notion of capitalism.

a) **Capitalism as a Spirit of Enterprise**

This idea has been popularised by the writings of Werner Sombart. He has sought the essence of capitalism, not in any one aspect of its economic anatomy or its physiology.   But in the totality of those aspects as represented in the *geist* or spirit that inspired the life of a whole epoch. This spirit is a synthesis of the spirit of enterprise or adventure with "bourgeois spirit" of calculation and rationality. Believing that at different times different economic attitudes have always reigned, and that it is this spirit which has created the suitable form for itself and thereby an economic organisation. Thus he traced the origin of capitalism in the development of states of mind. And hence, human behaviour is conducive to the existence of those economic forms and relationships which are characteristic of the modern world.

The pre-capitalist man was "a natural man" who conceived economic activity as simply catering to his natural wants. And in pre-capitalist times "at the centre of all effort and all care, stood living man": he is the measure of all things. By contrast, the capitalist, turned topsy-turvy the natural man - his primitive and original outlook and all the values of life, and saw the amassing of capital as the dominant motive of economic activity. And in an attitude of sober rationality and by the methods of precise quantitative calculation, subordinated everything in life to this end.

More simply, Max Weber defined capitalism as "present wherever the industrial provision for the needs of a human group is carried out by the method of enterprise". Weber used the spirit of capitalism to describe that attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically".

b) Capitalism as a Commercial System

This is the meaning more often found implicit in the treatment of historical material than explicitly formulated. This notion virtually identifies capitalism with the organisation of production for a distant market. However, the regime of the early craft gild, where the craftsman sold his products retail in the town market, would presumably be excluded by this definition. Capitalism could be regarded as being present as soon as the acts of production and retail sale came to be separated in space and time by the intervention of a wholesale merchant. This merchant advanced money for the purchase of wares with the object of subsequent sale at a profit. To a large extent this notion is a lineal descendent of the scheme of development employed by the German Historical School, with its primary distinction between the "natural economy" of the medieval world and the "money economy" that succeeded it. Money economy emphasized that the `market' defined the stages in the growth of the modern economic world.

In the words of Bucher, the essential criterion is "the relation which exist between the production and consumption of goods. To be more precise, the length of the route which the goods traverse in passing from producers to consumers. This is not uncommonly found in close conjunction with a definition of capitalism as a system of economic activity that is dominated by a certain type of motive or profit motive. The existence in any period of a substantial number of persons who rely on the investment of money with the object of deriving an income, whether this investment be in trade or in usury in production being taken as evidence of the existence of an element of capitalism. Prof. Naussbaum defines Capitalism as "a system of exchange economy" in which the orienting principle of economic activity is unrestricted profit. To which he adds an additional characteristic, saying such a system is marked by a differentiation of the population into "owners and property-less workers".

c) Capitalism as a Particular Mode of Production

We have the meaning originally given by Marx, who sought the essence of capitalism neither in a spirit of enterprise nor in the use of money to finance a series of exchange transactions with the object of gain, but in a particular mode of production. By mode of production, he did not refer merely to the state of technique, what he termed as the state of productive forces. But to the way in which the means of production were owned and to the social relations between men which resulted from their connections with the process of production. Thus capitalism was not simply a system of

production for the market — but a system of commodity of production as Marx termed it. And also it is a system under which labour-power had "itself become a commodity" and was bought and sold on the market like any other object of exchange.

The historical prerequisite of capitalism was the concentration of ownership of the means of production in the hands of a class, consisting of only a minor section of society. As a consequence of this, a large-scale property-less class emerges, for whom the sale of their labour power was their only source of livelihood. Accordingly, productive activity was accomplished by the property-less class not by virtue of legal compulsion, but on the basis of a wage-contract. It is clear that such a definition excludes the system of independent handicraft production where the craftsman owned his own petty implements of production and undertook the sale of his own wares. However, here there was no divorce between the ownership and work; and except where he relied to any extent on the employment of journeymen, it was the purchase and sale of inanimate wares not of human labour-power that was his primary concern.

What differentiates the use of this definition from others is that the existence of trade and of money lending and the presence of a specialised class of merchants or financiers. Even though they may be men of substance, it does not suffice to constitute a capitalist society. Men of capital, however acquisitive are not enough; their capital must be used to yoke labour to the creation of surplus value in production.

d) Reflections on the origin of capitalism

Both Sombart's conception of the capitalist spirit and a conception of capitalism as primarily a commercial system share in common certain lacunae.

▫ These conceptions focus acquisitive investment of money.

▫ These conceptions are insufficiently restrictive to confine the term to any one epoch of history.

▫ And that they seem to lead inexorably to the conclusion that nearly all periods of history have been capitalist, at least in some degree.

The further difficulty attaches to the idealist conception of Sombart and Weber and their school, that if capitalism as an economic form is the creation of the capitalist spirit, the genesis of the latter must first of all be accounted for before the origin of capitalism can be explained. If this capitalist spirit is itself an historical product, what caused its appearance on the historical stage? To this riddle, no satisfactory answer has been propounded to date, other than the accidental coincidence in time of various states of mind.

Box 13.1: Protestantism and Capitalism

The search for a cause has led to the unsatisfactory and inconclusive debate as to whether it is true that Protestantism gave rise to the capitalist spirit (as Weber and Troeltsch have claimed). There seems to be scarcely more reason to regard capitalism as the child of the reformation than to hold, with Sombart that it was largely the creation of the Jews. However, if the emergence of a new economic system is to be explained in terms of an idea, this idea must embody in its "embryo" the essence of the future system in advance, which has to be explained. On the other hand, the definition of capitalism in actual use in historiography has moved increasingly towards that which was first adopted and developed by Marx.

Emphasis has increasingly come to be placed on the emergence of a new type of class differentiation between capitalist and proletariat rather than on profit as a motive of economic activity. And attention has increasingly been focussed upon the appearance of a relationship between producer and capitalist, analogous to the employment relation between master and wage earner in the fully mature industrial system of the 19th C. On the whole, this is because the material which research has disclosed, has forced this emphasis upon the attention of historians in their search for the essential differentiation of the modern age, than because they have been predisposed towards it by the writings of Marx. Thus Mr Lipson in claiming that the essentials of capitalism were present some centuries before the industrial revolution, states that "the fundamental feature of capitalism is the wage-system under which the worker has no right of ownership in the wares which he manufactures. The worker sells not the fruits of his labour but the labour itself, a distinction which, is of vital economic significance.

13.3 Development and Function of Capitalism

a) Stages of Capitalism

The development of capitalism falls into a number of stages characterised by different levels of maturity. Each of them is recognizable by fairly distinctive traits only when we seek to trace the stages and to select one of them as marking the opening stage of capitalism. If we are speaking Capitalism as a specific mode of production, then it follows that we cannot date the dawn of this system from the first signs of the appearance of large-scale trading and of a merchant class, and we can not speak of a special period of merchant capitalism. We must look for the opening of the capitalist period only when changes in the mode of production occur, in the sense of a direct subordination of the producer to a capitalist. This is not just a point of terminology, but of substance.

The Main work of Marx carries the title: "Capital". Marx spent many years of his life on the analysis of capitalism, because he was convinced that a thorough theoretical understanding was needed in order to facilitate the practical critique of capitalism, its overthrow by the proletariat. As the sub-title puts it, "Capital" is "A Critique of Political Economy". Political Economy stands for the economic theory developed by the classical bourgeois economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Marx studied their theories in minute detail. Starting their theories and subjecting their categories such as value, commodity, money, capital, etc, to a sharp critical analysis, Marx proceeds to expose the true nature of capitalism. In the process he breaks down the powerful scientific legitimation of capitalist economy and not only provides a new scientific model for the analysis of capital, but lays the foundations for a fundamental critique of the totality of capitalism.

b) Political Economy of Capitalism

There are two ways to study capitalism and to get to know its specific character and both ways we need in order to get a full understanding. The first way is to study its history, how it was born, how it developed, under which circumstances, and with what results. This requires a study not only of the economic process but of the development of the whole bourgeois society. It is wide field, as each country has its own history in this respect. But such studies presuppose the second way to study capitalism, namely the systematic analysis of the economic structure of capitalist society. In that

case one has to start not from the historical origins, but from the capitalist system as a totality. That is the approach, which Marx follows in "Capital".

> **Box 13.2: Dialectical Logic**
>
> Historically one would have to begin with agriculture and the category of ground-rent. By taking capital as starting point and finishing point Marx follows the path of dialectical logic. This method presupposes the concrete totality of the system, but for the sake of analysis it takes one part after the other till it is able to conceive and present how all aspects, all relations, all categories, function as parts of totality. Marx calls it the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete. The isolated part may look real and concrete, but it is an abstraction from the more complex reality. It is the "rich totality of many determinations and relations" which forms the concrete reality.

Capital is constructed according to this dialectical logic. Volume I is devoted to the analysis of "The process of production of capital". We can neither discuss all the theories forwarded by Marx in "Capital" nor can we go into the specifics of the historical development of capitalism. We can only highlight some of the main theoretical statements and refer to some of the main aspects of the historical process.

13.4 Commodity Production and Capitalist Production

A first characteristic of capitalist economy is that it is a form of commodity production i.e. production for sale, production for the market. That is why Marx starts his analysis of the capitalist mode of production with the analysis of "commodities". But not all commodity production is already capitalist production. Commodity production emerged thousands of years back in human history whereas capitalism is only a few hundred years old. In primitive society all production is for direct use, there is no production for exchange on the market. Production of commodities, of goods for exchange, developed slowly. For a long time, it plays only a subordinate role. Only in capitalist society commodity production becomes the completely dominant form of production, it becomes generalised.

> **Reflection and Action 13.1**
>
> Ls commodity production a recent phenomenon? Give some of its characteristics.

Analysing the mode of simple commodity production, Marx characterises the purpose as : to sell in order to buy. The peasant wants to sell some grain in order to buy grain. The weaver comes to sell some cloth in order to buy grain. The operation can be presented as C-M-C. i.e. Commodity – Money – Commodity. One sells one commodity in order to buy another commodity. Money is a means of exchange, just to make the transaction easier. The value of the two commodities, of C and C, is the same, is equivalent. However, on the market place we find not only the peasant and the artisan, but also the merchant. His economic operation is a different one: he buys in order to sell. He comes to the market not with commodities but with money. With that money he buys some product in order to sell it a higher price. This operation can be presented as M-C-M i.e. Money-Commodity-Money with increased value. This money which has been increased by a

surplus-value is called capital. Capital has been there long before capitalism, in the form of merchant capital or usurer-capital, money-lender capital. The difference is that these forms of capital derive their profit from their role in the exchange of commodities, in the sphere of distribution, of circulation, of the market. The usurer and the merchant appropriate part of the surplus-value which has been produced, but they don't control the production itself.

The capitalist mode of production comes into being when capital moves into the sphere of production, when it gets hold of the means of production and starts controlling and directing production itself. This is a long historical process, which starts in Medieval Europe. Its basic characteristics are:

- The separation of the producer from his means of production;

- The concentration of the means of production in the hands of one class, the bourgeoisie;

- The formation of another class, which has no means of subsistence other than the sale of its labour power, the proletariat.

Capitalist production is impossible as long as the producers still own or control the means of production. As long as an artisan, a weaver or a carpenter, has his own tools and workshop, he will not voluntarily go and sell his labour-power and start working in a factory. As long as a peasant possesses some land he will prefer to work on it rather than get hired as a labourer. Capitalist production needs workers, people who sell their labour-power. Therefore, it needs the separation of producers and means of production, so that the producers are forced by economic compulsion to sell their labour-power.

This separation has taken place in various ways, usually in a very brutal and bloody manner. "In actual history, it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, played the greater part". Marx has documented this for England in capital I, part VIII, ch.26., showing that the "so-called primitive accumulation" is "nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production".

The result of this process of separation is the formation of two classes, which form the two poles of capitalist society. On the one side we find the bourgeoisie as the class of owners in whose hand the means of production are concentrated. On the other side we find the proletariat as the class which has to find its subsistence by the sale of its labour power. Bourgeoisie and proletariat are the basic classes of capitalist society but not necessarily the only ones. Other classes such as intermediate sections, in various combinations may exist. But capitalism is possible only if there is a class of owners on the one hand, and a class of non-owners on the other hand. Secondly, it is the relationship to the means of production, which characterises these classes: ownership/control and non-ownership. It is not simply a question of rich and poor. Not all poor people are workers. They may be petty artisans, or hawkers, or peasants who still own some piece of land. An industrial worker may earn more, and yet he is a member of the working class whereas the poor peasant-owner is not.

The working class is not homogeneous. It consists of various sections, skilled and unskilled, on daily wages or on monthly pay, under the poverty line and well above it. What unites them is that they are all forced to sell their

labour power, be it under different conditions. A working class crosses the border-line of the working class only when his salary allows him to set up his own shop, to become a petty money-lender or to start living or renting out houses etc.

13.5 Expansion of Markets and Production

A further pre-condition for the development of capitalism is the expansion of the market. Pre-capitalist small-scale commodity production works for a limited market. In the 16th C, a commercial revolution took place in Europe. Discoveries of new trade routes opened the Vasco-da-Gama era of world-wide trade under colonial conditions. The expansion of the market encouraged large-scale production and thus the growth of capitalism.

The capitalist entrepreneurs can emerge only when a certain scale of production has been reached. The guild master and his limited number of journey-men and apprentices do not produce enough for setting the master free to do only the directing and supervising work. The capitalist as director of an enterprise emerges with the scale of production growing larger.

a) The Production of Surplus Value

With the market for commodity-production expanding and with a minimum of capital in the hands of a class of owners of the means of production and with a sufficient number of workers ready to be hired on the labour market, capitalist production can develop. Once it has gathered momentum it has its own internal dynamism to expand further and further. Marx calls it the "restless never-ending process of profit-making". How does it work? The key answer of Marx is his theory of the production of surplus value.

Box 13.3: The Capitalist Entrepreneur

Capital is formed when money ceases to be only a means of exchange, which facilitates the exchange of commodities and when the increase of money, adding new value, becomes the aim of economic transactions. The usurer and the merchant try to achieve this in the sphere of the market. The capitalist entrepreneur does it by subordinating the process of production itself to this purpose. He buys raw materials, means of labour, etc., and he buys labour-power. The labourers are paid for the use, for the consumption of their labour-power by wages. The owner of the means of production appropriates heir products. After selling them, he has made a profit. Where does this additional money come from? Has money the power, to create more money? Is it the shrewdness of the capitalist? Of course, occasionally there may be a windfall through a shrewd operation. But that does not explain the general process of profit-making. There are occassional set-backs as well for various reasons. Marx finds the course of profit hidden in one particular commodity which the capitalist buys on the market. The commodity is labour-power.

For Marx the extraction of unpaid surplus-labour is the key to understand the different forms of society: rent paid to the landlord in feudal society, taxes paid to the state in Asiatic society. These forms are connected with different political structures, needed to enforce this extraction. In capitalist society the appropriation of surplus-value happens in a new way. It is no longer the unpaid labour of slaves or serfs but the unpaid labour of wage-labourers. Workers in capitalist society receive wages. It seems they are

paid for their work. That is the great mystification in capitalism which covers up the process of exploitation. Actually, they are paid not for their work but for the use of their labour-power. What they produce is worth more than their wages. The wages cover only the cost of necessary labour, that what is needed to maintain the labourer. The value of what he produces is more than that. The Capitalist appropriates the difference, which is the surplus. This is possible because labour-power is a commodity, which can be bought on the market.

b) The never-ending process of profit-making

Capitalist tries to increase the rate of surplus value all the time. Now we raise the question why the capitalist has to be involved in such a restless manner in profit-making. This can be attributed to the unlimited greed, which is fostered by capitalism. But this greed should not be understood in a moralistic manner. But as capitalists, the process of accumulating capital will continue, otherwise they go bankrupt. This pressure comes from the competition between the individual capitalists which is characteristic of capitalism.

If a capitalist does not invest in new technology, if he does not expand production, others will move ahead and conquer the market and he will be left out in the cold. He cannot appropriate profit for his own consumption only or spend it just for some unproductive purposes. He must take part of it and put it aside for reinvestment. That part becomes new additional capital. Thus he has to accumulate capital. This implies the trend towards the concentration of capital in large-scale production. This concentration again becomes the basis for the centralisation of the ownership and control of capital in the hands of a few.

Reflection and Action 13.2

What is the role of new technology in capitalist production? Does it alter ownership and control of capital?

The market is like the jungle with its law of survival of the fittest. The general tendency is towards the elimination of the smaller one, to the centralisation of capital. The bigger capitalists grow bigger and fewer. We now consider what effect the law of accumulation of capital has on labour. Accumulation of capital means an increased demand for labour-power. This could lead to a rise in the price of labour. On a modest scale wages may rise for a while. But this does not change the basic position of the labourer, who is completely dependent on the capitalist. Capitalism does not only create demand for labour, it also creates unemployment through the process of mechanisation. In this way it creates an "industrial reserve army" of unemployed whose existence makes it possible for the capitalists to keep the wages of the employed under control. "The action of the law of supply and demand of labour on this basis completes the despotism of capital".

There is another reason why the capitalist has to expand production unlimited. In the process of accumulation of capital the proportion of constant capital increases and becomes greater in relation to variable capital. This is called the growth in the organic composition of capital. Since the constant capital increases in the process of mechanisation and the part of surplus value producing variable capital becomes relatively less, Marx assumes a "tendency

of the average rate of profit to decline". The more a capitalist expands the lower his rate of profit becomes. He can only make good for it by expanding the scale of production.

But the ever increasing expansion of capitalist production leads to inevitably to an economic crisis. That is the other law of capitalism which, Marx establishes. These crises are the result of the basic contradiction between capital and labour. In order to survive capital must accumulate and expand. For its expanding mass-production it must find masses of buyers. These masses consist to a large extent of workers. They can only buy if they receive higher wages. But higher wages reduce the capitalists' rate of profit. Every individual capitalist, therefore, would like to keep his own workers poor, and to see the rest of the workers rich enough to buy his products.

13.6 Monopoly Capitalism and Imperialism

The dynamism of capitalism, the permanent pressure to accumulate capital, leads to a change in the character of capitalist economy. The era of free competition brought about a tremendous expansion of productive forces and of production on a mass scale. But this led simultaneously to the concentration and centralisation of capital, and thus to a new situation in which a decreasing number of big companies or groups of companies were able to conquer monopoly positions in the market. Monopoly capitalism developed through cartels, trusts, holdings and fusions, capitalists move to protect the rate of profit against the effects of fee competition. Once the market is under monopoly control higher profits can be achieved by limiting production instead of increasing it, by holding back technological improvements instead of introducing them, by lowering the quality of products instead of rising it. Marx foresaw the rise of monopolies as the result of the concentration of capital. But monopoly capitalism became dominant only after Marx's death.

Several Marxists tried to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of this new phase of capitalism. The Austrian Marxist Rudolf Hilferding published his study "Finance Capital — the latest phase of capitalist development" in 1910. The polish-German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg came out with her study "The accumulation of Capital" in 1913. The Russian Marxist N Bukharin finished his "Imperialism and World Economy" in 1915. And Lenin completed his "Imperialism, the highest stage of Capitalism" in 1916.

Lenin made use both of Hilferding and Bukharin, though he differed on certain points with them. For example, he did not agree with Hilferding that monopolisation would eliminate all free competition within a national economy.

Box 13.4: Basic Features of Imperialism

- The concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life.
- The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this 'finance captial', of a financial oligarchy;
- The export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance;
- The formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves; and
- The territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed.

13.7 Conclusion

The origins and development of capitalism has been traced and understood by various social thinkers based on different parameters. However, Marx's understanding of Capitalism has influenced greatly than any other theories. The main argument by Marx is that feudal mode of production has been replaced by capitalist mode of production. And under capitalism, society is divided into two main antagonistic classes — the class of capitalists or bourgeoisie and the class of proletariats. The main economic law and the stimulus of the capitalist mode of production is the creation of surplus value by the workers and its appropriation. The unpaid labour of wage workers is the source of surplus value.

13.8 Further Reading

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Rationality, Work and Organisation

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit you should be able to

- understand the concept of Rationality, Work and Organisation vis-à-vis modern capitalist society

- understand the concept of Organisations through theory of organisation and Sociology of organisations

14.1 Introduction

In modern society, the significance of rationality, work and organisation is implicit in our everyday life. The Classical Sociologists Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim have conceptually dealt with these concepts in their writings. In their quest to analyse the structure of capitalism and its ramifications for a just and fair social order they explained these concepts from different standpoints. The organization theory and sociology of organizations provide comprehensive analysis of organisations.

14.2 Rationality

The world of modernity, Weber stressed over and over again, has been deserted by the gods. Man has chased them away and has rationalized and made calculable and predictable what in an earlier age had seemed governed by chance, but also by feeling, passion and commitment, by personal appeal and personal fear, by grace and by the ethics of charismatic heroes. Weber attempted to document this development in a variety of institutional areas. His studies in the sociology of religion were meant to trace the complicated and tortuous ways in which the gradual "rationalisation of religious life" had led the displacement of magical procedure by Wertrational systematisation of man's relation to the divine. He attempted to show how prophets with their charismatic appeals had undermined priestly powers based on tradition; how with the emergence of "book religion" the final systematisation and rationalisation of the religious sphere had set in, which found its culmination in the Protestant ethic.

In the sphere of law, Weber documented a similar course from a "kadi Justiz", the personalised dispensing of justice by wise leaders or elders, to the codified, rationalised and impersonal justice of the modern world. He traced the development of political authority from kings endowed with hereditary charisma and thaumaturgical powers, to cool heads of state, ruling within the strict limits of legal prescriptions and rationally enacted law. Even so private an area of experience as music, Weber contended, was not exempt

from the rationalising tendencies of western society. In his writings on the sociology of music, Weber contrasted the concise notations and the well-tempered scale of modern music — the rigorous standardisation and coordination that governs a modern symphony orchestra — with the spontaneity and inventiveness of the musical systems of Asia or of non-literate tribes.

a) The Spread of Secular Rationalism

Among the characteristics, in terms of which European development was distinctive were the specific form of the state and the existence of rational law. Weber attaches great emphasis to the significance to the heritage of Roman law for the subsequent social and economic development of Europe, and in particular for the rise of the modern state. 'Without the juristic rationalism, the rise of the absolute state is just as little imaginable as is the (French) Revolution'.

The connection between this and the development of rational capitalism, however was not simple and clear-cut. Modern capitalism first took root in England, but that country was much less influenced by Roman law than other continental countries were. The prior existence of a system of rational law was only one influence in a complicated interplay of factors leading to the formation of the modern state. The trend towards the development of the modern state, characterised by the presence of a professional administration carried on by salaried officials, and based upon the concept of citizenship, was certainly not wholly an outcome of economic rationalization, and in part preceded it. Nevertheless, it is true that the advance of the capitalist economic order and the growth of the state are intimately connected. The development of national and international markets, and the concomitant destruction in the destruction of the influence of the local groups, such a kinship units, which formerly played a large part in regulating contracts, all promote the monopolisation and regulation of all "legitimate" coercive power by one universalist coercive institution.

Reflection and Action 14.1

Discuss the characteristics of the modern state? Explain its relation to rationality.

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b) Modern Capitalistic Enterprise

Essential to modern capitalistic enterprise, according to Weber is the possibility of rational calculation of profits and losses in terms of money. Modern capitalism is inconceivable without the development of capital accounting. In Weber's view, rational book-keeping constitutes the most integral expression of what makes the modern type of capitalist production dissimilar to prior sorts of capitalistic activity such a usury or adeventures capitalism. The circumstances which Weber details as necessary to the existence of capital accounting is stable productive enterprises constitute those which Weber accepts as the basic prerequisites of modern capitalism, and include those factors upon which Marx placed more emphasis:

Box 14.1: Prerequisites of Modern Capitalism

1) The existence of a large mass of wage-labourers, who are not only legally 'free' to dispose of their labour power on the open market, but who are actually forced to do so to earn their livelihood.

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2) An absence of restrictions upon economic exchange in the market: in particular, the removal of status monopolies on production and consumption (such as existed in extreme form, in the Indian caste system).

3) The use of a technology, which is constructed and organised on the basis of rational principles: mechanisation is the clearest manifestation of this.

4) The detachment of the productive enterprise from the household: while the separation of home and workplace is found elsewhere, as in the bazaar, it is only in western Europe that this has proceeded very far.

But these economic attributes could not exist without the rational legal administration of the modern state. This is as distinctive a characteristic of the contemporary capitalist order as is the class division between capital and labour in the economic sphere. In general terms, political organisations can be classified in the same way as economic enterprises, in relation to whether the 'the means of administration' are owned by the administrative staff or are separated from their ownership. The greater the degree to which the ruler succeeds in surrounding himself/herself with a propertyless staff responsible only to him, the less he is challenged by nominally subordinate powers. This process is most complete in the modern bureaucratic state.

14.3 Organisation Theory and Sociology of Organisations

In practice, organisation theory and sociology of organisations are used interchangeably, although the former has a slightly wider remit than the latter as it also covers work by non-sociologists, including those who are concerned to advice to management on how organisations should be designed and operated. As various forms of organisation pervade social life some difficulty also attaches to the definition of those, which are the subject-matter of the sociology of organisations. In a useful discussion of this problem, David Silverman has suggested that the 'formal organisations' with which this branch of sociology is concerned have three distinguishing features:

▫ They arise at an ascertainable moment in time;

▫ As artifacts they exhibit patterns of social relations which are less taken for granted than those in non-formal organizations (such as family) and which organisational participants often seek to coordinate and control; and

▫ Consequently, considerable attention is paid to the nature of these social relations and to planned changes in them.

Early organisation theory developed along two parallel tracks, reflecting in dual sociological and managerial origins. The growth of industrial societies in the nineteenth century involved the expansion of large-scale organisations — especially those of the factory and the state. The former of these gave rise to the doctrines of scientific management associated with Frederick William Taylor, and the latter provided the exemplar which Weber had in mind when developing his ideal typical account of the structure of bureaucracy. Both these theories concentrated on analyzing the structures of organisations; that is, the nature of the various positions occupied by organisational

personnel, the powers and duties attaching to these positions, and their relationship to the work required to carry out the explicitly stated goals of the organisation. Both also viewed organisations as hierarchical structures, essential for the managerial control of work.

However, in the 1930s and 1940s, a variety of studies (such as those of the Human Relations Movement by Chester Barnard, and the now classic study of the Tennessee valley authority by the sociologist Philip Seiznick) opened up a second area for analysis: the study of the social processes occurring in organisations, often with a particular emphasis on how informal, unofficial social relations could constrain or even subvert the official goals of the organisation, and with organisation as co-operative rather than hierarchically controlled social institutions.

There now exists an immense variety of sociological studies of organisations and theories about them. Indeed, most of the major schools of sociological theory have contributed to this literature. Stewart Clegg and David Dunkerley I their book Organisation Class and Control (1980) identify four major groupings among the diverse approaches.   These are as follows:

a) Typologies of Organisations

Typologies of organisations involve attempts to classify organisations according to a variety of key characteristics, such as who benefits from their operations, or how they obtain compliance from their members. Works by Peter Blau, Amitai Etzioni, Robert Blauner and Tom Burns and G.M. Stalker are among the best know such studies.

b) Organisations as Social Systems

This approach is particularly identified by Talcott Parson's structural functionalist theory of action and with Philip Selznick and Robert Merton's more focused work on organizations. Organisations consist of social systems in interaction with other social systems (therefore open systems) whose values and goals are oriented to those of the wider society. According to Parsons, key requirements for organisational maintenance (which is seen to be the overriding goal of any organisation) are those which apply to all social system; namely adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern (or value) maintenance.

c) Organisations as Empirically Contingent Structures

An approach particularly associated in the United Kingdom, with research at the University of Aston. The typological and social systems approaches have difficulty in clearly defining the organisation as a theoretical object. (Is it defined solely by a set of typological characteristics? Or, if its is an open system, where are the system boundaries to be drawn). The Aston programme applies insights derived form psychology, together with statistical techniques such as scaling and factor analysis to relate measures of organisational performance to different dimensions of organisational structure (such as the degree of specialisation of tasks and centralisation of authority). The latter are then related to independent contextual variables such as size, technology, and location of the enterprise. This essentially empiricist approach is subject to all the usual criticisms which apply to such a methodology.

d) Organisations as Structures of Action

This approach focuses on the circumstances determining the actions of

individuals in organizations. An early contribution was made by Herbert A Simon's work on satisficing. Later work, for example by David Silverman is influenced by phenomenological sociology (especially ethnomethodology) and interactionism. Instead of reifying the organization (referring to organisational goals and needs as if the organisation, like a human being, could have such things) organisations are here analyzed as the outcome of motivated people attempting to resolve their own problems. They are socially constructed by the individual actions of members having habituated expectations of each other. This approach throws doubt on whether it makes sense to refer to organisations as institutions, which pursue organisational goals. In any event, there have been many studies, which show for example, that official goals may bear no relationship to actual or operative goals; that organisations frequently have multiple and conflicting goals and that goal displacement may occur. The informal culture of work within organisations has been and continues to be extensively studied by sociologists influenced by the Chicago school of sociology. This tradition is illustrated in the work of, for example William F Whyte (Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry, 1948), Donald Roy ('Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop', American Journal of Sociology, 1952) and Howard Becker (Boys in White, 1961).

Reflection and Action 14.2

Describe what is an organisation. Make a list of their basic charactrisics.

A great deal of organization theory has been criticized for its normative (in this case pro-managerial) bias; for its individualistic analysis of the members of organizations (that is, for being more informed by psychological, than by relations of power and control in society affect and are affected by organizations (in other words for concentrating mainly on the internal exercise of managerial authority and attempts to subvert it).

14.4 Work and Organisation

a) Theoretical Perspectives on Division of Labour

In Marx's analysis of bourgeois society, there are two directly related but partially separable sources of alienation rooted in the capitalist mode of production. The first of these is alienation in the labour-process, in the productive activity of the worker. The second is the alienation of the worker from his product, that is, from control of the result of the labour-process. For the sake of convenience, Giddens refers to the former as 'technological alienation' and latter as 'market alienation'. Both of these derive from the division of labour involved in capitalist production. The latter expresses the fact that the organisation of productive relationships constitute a class system resting upon an exploitative dominance of one class by another; the former identifies occupational specialisation as the source of the fragmentation of work into routine and undemanding tasks.

For Marx, both types of alienation are integral to the expansion of the division of labour: the emergence of class societies in history is dependent upon the growth of the specialisation of tasks made possible by the existence of surplus production. The formation of a classless society will thus lead to the abolition of the division of labour as it is known under capitalism. In Marx's conception of both market and technological alienation are thus inseparable from the division of labour: 'the division of labour is nothing but the alienated form of human activity...'

Box 14.2: Division of Labour

Durkheim treats the growth of the division of labour is portrayed in terms of the integrating consequences of specialisation rather than in terms of the formation of class systems. Consequently, Durkheim treats class conflict, not as providing a basis for the revolutionary restructuring of society, but as symptomatic of deficiencies in the moral co-ordination of different occupational groups within the division of labour. In Durkheim's thesis, the 'forced' division of labour is largely separate form the 'anomic' division of labour, and mitigation of the first will not in itself cope with the problems posed by the second. According to him, the socialism of Marx is wholly concerned with the alienation of the forced division of labour, which is to be accomplished through the regulation of the market - the socialisation of production. But in Durkheim's stated view, which he opposes to this, the increasing dominance of economic relationships, consequent upon the destruction of the traditional institutions which were the moral backbone of prior forms of society, is precisely the main cause of the modern 'crisis'.

It is only through moral acceptance in his particular role in the division of labour that the individual is able to 'achieve a high degree of autonomy as a self-conscious being, and can escape both the tyranny of the rigid moral conformity demanded in undifferentiated socieities on the one hand, and the tyranny of unrealisable desires on the other. However, the premises of Marx's conception was that not the moral integration of the indivdual within a differentiated division of labour, but the effective dissolution of the division of labour as an organising principle of human social intercourse.

b) The Problem of Bureaucratic Organisation

In Marx's analysis of the extension of the division of labour underlying the formation of capitalist enterprise, the expropriation of the worker from his means of production is given pride of place. In Marx's view, this is the most essential condition for the emergence of bourgeois society, and identifies, along an historical dimension, the formation of the class relationship between capital and labour, which is implicit in the capitalist mode of production. It is the intrinsic nature of the connection between the division of labour and the class structure, which makes it possible for Marx to proceed to the conclusion that the transcendence of alienation is possible through the abolition of capitalism. Neither Durkheim nor Weber denies the possibility of the formation of socialist societies: but both assert that the transition to socialism will not radically change the existing form of society.

An important part of Weber's writings consists in delineating the factors promoting rationalization on the 'level of meaning'. Weber always insisted upon tracing the nexus of social relationships, which both influence and are influenced by, the growth in rationalization. Thus for Weber, it is not only the degree but the 'direction' assumed by rationalization in the west, and more specifically, in capitalism, differs from that of the other major civilizations. In modern western capitalism, there are various spheres in which rationalisation has proceeded in a direction, as well as to an extent, unknown elsewhere.

The first is the spread of science, a phenomenon of basic significance: not only does it complete the process of 'disenchantment', but it makes possible the progressive implementation of rational technology in production. Moreover, 'scientific work is chained to the course of progress... Every

scientific "fulfillment" raises "questions"; it asks to be "surpassed" and outdated'. Thus the institutionalisation of science weds modern life into an implicit dynamic of innovation and change, which cannot in itself, confer 'meaning'. The application of scientific innovation to technology is combined, in the modern economy, with the introduction of methods of rational calculation, exemplified in book-keeping, which promote that methodical conduct of entrepreneurial activity which is so distinctive of contemporary capitalism. The conduct of rational capitalism, in turn entails unavoidable consequences in the sphere of social organisation, and inevitably fosters the spread of bureaucracy.

Weber treats bureaucratic specialisation of tasks as the most integral feature of capitalism. Thus Weber expressly denies that the expropriation of the worker from his means of production has been confined to the immediate sphere of industry. In Weber's thesis any form of organisation, which has a hierarchy of authority can become subject to a process of 'expropriation': for the Marxian notion of the 'means of production' Weber substitutes the 'means of administration'. Weber gives to the organization of relationships of domination and subordination the prominence, which Marx attributes to relationships of production. Any political association, according to Weber, may be organised in an 'estate' form, in which the officials themselves own their means of administration.

These developments were the most important factors promoting the emergence of the modern state in which 'expert officialdom', based on the division of labour' is wholly separated from ownership of its means of administration. The spread of bureaucratic specialisation is mainly promoted by its technical superiority over the other types of organisation in co-ordinating administrative tasks. This in turn is partly dependent upon the filling of bureaucratic positions according to the possession of specialised educational qualifications. 'Only the modern development of full bureaucratisation brings the system of rational, specialised examinations irresistibly to the fore'.

Reflection and Action 14.3

Explain Weber's concept of "disenchantment". How does this affect economic progress?

The expansion of bureaucratisation hence necessarily leads to the demand for specialist education, and increasingly fragments the humanist culture, which in previous times, made possible the 'universal man', the 'thorough and complete human being' whom Durkheim speaks of. Weber expresses an essentially similar point in holding that the 'cultivated man' of earlier ages is now, displaced by the trained specialist. Since the trend towards bureaucratisation is irreversible in capitalism, it follows that the growth of functional specialisation is a necessary concomitant of the modern social order.

c) Bureaucracy and Democracy

The growth of bureaucratic state proceeds in close connection with the advance of political democratisation. This because the demands made by democrats for political representation and for equality before the law necessitate complex administrative and juridical provisions to prevent the exercise of privilege. The fact that democracy and bureaucratisation are so

closely related creates one of the most profound sources of tension in the modern capitalist order. For a while, the extension of democratic rights in the contemporary state cannot be achieved without the formulation of new bureaucratic regulations, there is a basic opposition between democracy and bureaucracy.

Box 14.3: Aspects of Rationality

This is, for Weber, one of the most poignant examples of the contradictions which can exist between the formal and substantive rationality of social action: the growth of the abstract legal procedures which help to eliminate privilege themselves reintroduce a new form of entrenched monopoly which is in some respects 'arbitrary' and autonomous than that previously extant. Bureaucratic organization is promoted by the democractic requisite of impersonal selection for positions, from strata of the population, according to the possession of educational qualifications. But this in itself creates strata of officials who, because of the separation of their position from the external influence of privileged individuals or groups, possess a more inclusive range of administrative powers than before.

The existence of large-scale parties is inevitable in the modern state; but if these parties are headed by political leaders who have strong conviction of the significance of their vocation, ureaucratisation of the political structure can be partially checked.

d) Bureaucracy and Socialism

If the modern economy were bureaucra on a socialist basis, and sought to attain a level of technical efficiency in production and distribution of goods comparable to that of capitalism, this would necessitate 'a tremendous increase in the importance of professional bureaucrats'. The bureaucrati division of labour, which is an integral characteristic of the modern economy demands the precise co-ordination of functions. This is a fact which has been at the root of the increase of bureaucratisation associated with the expansion of capitalism. But the formation of a socialist state would entail a considerably higher degree of bureaucratization, since it would place a wider range of administrative tasks in the hands of the state.

Weber's primary objections to socialism concern the bureaucratic ramifications, which it would entail. Those offers another example of the characteristic dilemma of modern times. Those who seek to set up a socialist society, they act under the vision of the achievement of an order in which political participation and self-realisation will go beyond the circumscribed form of party democracy found in capitalism. But the result of the impetus to bureauc his vision can only be in the direction of promoting the bureaucratisation of industry and the state, which will in fact further reduce the political autonomy of the mass population.

e) Modern Features of Bureaucracy

It is a singular feature of bureaucracy that once it has become established it is, in Weber's word 'escape proof'. Modern bureaucracy, characterised by a much higher level of rational specialisation than patrimonial organisations, is even more resistant to any attempt to rise society from its grip. 'Such an apparatus makes "revolution", in the sense of the forceful creation of entirely new formations of authority, more and more impossible.

The spread of bureaucracy in modern capitalism is both cause and consequence of the rationalisation of law, politics and industry. Bureaucratisation is the concrete, administrative manifestation of the rationalization of action which has penetrated into all spheres of western culture, including art, music, and architecture. Consequently, for Weber, the analysis of the growth of the bureaucratic state provides a paradigm for the explanation of the progression of bureaucratisation in all spheres. For Marx, on the other hand, the 'systematic and hierarchical division of labour' in the administration of the state represents a concentration of political power.

14.5 Conclusion

For Marx, a primary factor underlying the early origins of capitalism in western Europe is the historical process of the expropriation of producers form control of their means of production. Capitalism is thus, in its very essence, a class society. The basic contradictions inherent in the capitalist economy derive directly from its character as a system based upon production for exchange-value. The need to maintain, or to expand, the rate of profit, is in opposition to the tendential law of declining profits; the separation of the producer and consumer is the main factor lying behind the crises to which capitalism is recurrently subject; and the operation of the capitalist market entails both that labour-power cannot be sold above its exchange-value and that there comes into being a large 'reserve army' destined to live in pauperism. For Durkheim and Weber, the class structure is not integral to the progressive differentiation in the division of labour. Both repudiates the notion that these class divisions express its underlying nature. In Durkheim's conception, the 'forced' division of labour is an 'abnormal form', but it is not a necessary consequence of the extension of social differentiation in itself. It is primarily the use of economic power to enforce unjust contracts, which explains the occurrence of class conflict. What distinguishes the modern form of society form the traditional types is not its specific class character, but the prevalence of organic solidarity. In Weber's conception, rational calculation is the primary element in modern capitalistic enterprise, and the rationalisation of social life generally is the most distinctive attribute of modern western culture. The class relation which, Marx takes to be the pivot of capitalism is in fact only one element in a much more pervasive rationalisation, which extends the process of the 'expropriation of the worker from his means of production' into most of the institutions in contemporary society. The existence of contradictions within capitalism generates no historical necessity for such contradictions to be resolved. On the contrary, the advance of rationalisation, which certainly creates a hitherto unknown material abundance, inevitably stimulates a further separation between the distinctive values of western civilization (freedom, creativity, spontaneity) and the realities of the 'iron cage' in which modern man is confined.

14.6 Further Reading

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Unit 15
Entrepreneurship and Capitalism

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit you should be able to

▢   provide the meaning of entrepreneurship

▢   discuss the contributions of Weber and Schumpeter

▢   describe other attempt to study the phenomena of entrepreneurship

15.1 Introduction

In this unit entrepreneurship and development of capitalism as analysed by social scientists to the theoretical understanding has been discussed briefly. Effort has been made to analyse that how social sciences can provide new and fresh ideas about the theory of entrepreneurship and development of capitalism. While analyzing this, theoretical foundation of the classical thinkers, Weber and Schumpeter, has been identified. When classical theory of economics on its strength was rejected by the German Historical School, Weber's theoretical assertation had become meaningful on its theoretical ground, it has been described in section 1.3. Weber's idea on entrepreneurship is generally identified with the theory of Charisma, the perspective to which this theory is able to demonstrate the development of capitalism in the primitive stage of society is appeared in the sub-section 1.3.1. Also, this section presents how protestant ethos has provided such a social condition where entrepreneur achieved social acceptance, and led development of capitalism which was not available before the reformation. While sub-section 1.3.2 of this unit dealing with Schumpeter's contribution on entrepreneurship with reference to the theory of economic development and his economic, psychological and sociological perspectives have also been identified. How for Durkheim's idea can be useful to understand entrepreneurship has been tried to develop in sub-section 1.3.3. And some ideas of modern sociologists have also been incorporated in this section. Finally summary of this unit is given.

15.2 Meaning of Entrepreneurship

There is some unresolved controversy in the meaning of entrepreneurship. Although, there is some consensus also about the entrepreneurship which includes a part of administration and its function in decision making process for regulating some types of organisation. Some scholars refer to the term

for strategic or innovative decisions while others apply it for business organisations. The term can be clarified in the historical context. The genesis of the word is French which appeared long back particularly to denote "to do something". During early sixteen century, those who were engaged in leading military expeditions were lebelled as entrepreneurs. After 1700, the word was frequently referred to by the French for government road, bridge, harbour and fortification contractors and later to the architects. By 1800, the word appeared in the academic discipline as it had been used by a considerable number of the French economists, who treated the word in a specific sense in the field of economics that has given special meaning to entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, with differences emerging mostly from the features of the sector of economy. And those economists who were interested in Government treated the entrepreneur as a contractor, agricultural specialist (farmer) and industrialist as a risk taking capitalist (Encyclopedia of Social Science, 87-88). However, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship have been used in various contexts by the scholars at various points of time.

15.3 Theoretical Background of Entrepreneurship with Special Reference to Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter

Max Weber and Schumpeter though they belong to sociology and economics respectively, have contributed to develop theory to analyse entrepreneurship and its role in the development of capitalism in society. Both theorists with respect to their ideas and theories have some consensus and some differences. Schumpeter paid attention on identifying prescientific vision, hence, he made the task rather easier and assumed entrepreneur merely a manager, circular flow development system. So far as Weber's ideas are concerned, it is a difficult task to make an identification as his thoughts on entrepreneurship are often scattered in his all works. Nevertheless, *The protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism* can be identified a point of departure where he built up some theoretical foundation to understand the development of capitalism. Both scholars, varying in their interests, have formulated social theories and economic sociologies which, up to some extent, are similar in scope and theoretical conclusions. Many analogies can even be attributed Marx and many are yet to be explained (Macdonald, 1971: 71). Schumpeter though took the idea of Marx in analysing social aspect of entrepreneurship and tried to link with the development of capitalism, but his approach and conclusions are very much non-Marxian. Weber also in this context is not an exception whose treatment of social phenomena is not different with Schumpeter. Weber's conception, on attack on Marx's idea of materialistic explanation of history, was too a challenge to the economics as an autonomous scientific discipline. This situation has been explained by Bendix as "Weber has demonstrated…. economic conduct was inseparable from the idea with which men pursued their economic interests, and these ideas had to be understood on their own term" (1960: 52).

Reflection and Action 15.1

Is Webers and Schumpter analysis on entrepreneurs similar or different note down your answer.

At that time scholars of German historical school had been involving in asserting it for many years, and rejecting classical economic theory on its

strength. The new situation which emerged was Weber's assertation of entrepreneurship and development of capitalism on theoretical ground. Schumpeter (1980) stated that his exposition on entrepreneurship and development of capitalism rests on the fundamental distinction between static and dynamic situations. Both have formulated the theoretical structure at about same points of time, Schumpeter was trained in Austrian tradition of economic theory and Weber in German historical school.

15.4 Contribution of Max Weber

Weber's idea on entrepreneurship and development of capitalism is contradictory with Marx. Weber's attack on Marx's view was that the capitalist, equipped by new techniques and driven by rational procurement, had always neglected the old traditional method and attitudes, and had imposed on society his own ethos and a specific mode of production. Weber never accepted this and said that this was never a realistic situation for the process of capitalistic development. Even some situation had occurred in Weber's life span where a new man broke into a totally adopted traditional environment, and mode of production was specially capitalist therein. Apparently, here, new man neither was equipped by a new invention nor was capable of revolutionizing industry, however, he had a new spirit. Weber afterward takes a turn by emphasising to capitalist form of an organisation with capital turn over, entrepreneurial business activity and rational bookkeeping. Nonetheless, it was also traditionalistic in every way.

Box 15.1: Weber and Economics

Weber is always treated as a scholar of sociology, but during the last span on his career, when he was a mature Weber, he devoted nearly a decade in developing of perspective which was, no doubt, sociological but blended with economics (Swedberg, 1988). As a matter of fact, Weber was trained in the field of legal history, thus, the area in which he may have been much renowned could have been history of law. He also devoted about two years in teaching economics at two leading universities of Germany where he imparted the topics which were a combination of historical economics and marginal utility economics.

Apart from this, Weber through out his academic career worked for propagating philosophy of social sciences, economic history and political science. All these aspects can be observed in his idea about the entrepreneurship and development of capitalism.

Weber's theoretical propagation of entrepreneurship is generally identified with the theory of Charisma, which can be observed in Weber's analysis of exceptional type of human being, the Charismatic man, who by virtue of extraordinary personality influences others to follow him/her. Unfortunately, Weber's treatment of Charisma was misunderstood by many scholars. In fact, Weber treats Charisma as a significant agent of change of primitive phase of the society. And it has no relevance in modern capitalist society, where economic changes occur due to the enterprises which generate opportunities to make profit in market situation. Rationalisation of society begins with the replacement of myth and religion by science and Methodism. However, Charisma has a bit scope in development of capitalism in modern society. Weber's theory of entrepreneur and development of capitalism has two

important aspects: (1) as he says entrepreneur can be found in economic system and (2) entrepreneur will have to do much more with the direction of economic action in a collective perspective viz. enterprise which certainly is not an economic operation of an individual. At elementary stage of his work on entrepreneurship, Weber says, "Entrepreneurship means the taking over and organisation of some part of economy, in which people's needs are satisfied through exchange, for the sake of making profit and at one's own economic risk ([1898], 1990:57). His work, 'Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism' is significant to understand the theory of economic development from two aspects: (1) it brings out the reality of change in attitudes to words entrepreneurship that had been generated due to the reformation of western society, either one would be hostile or alienated for accepting or promoting it actively and (2) it brings out the fact that a certain kind of religious ethos namely Protestantism contributed a favourable condition for the development of capitalism as well as work culture which had given a scope for broader changes in the attitude of the society towards entrepreneurs. Prior to reformation, there was no social acceptance for money lending, trade and commerce as well as entrepreneurship.

Reflection and Action 15.2

Outline the role of Calvinism in reinterpreting religious ideology.

Religious sanctions did not allow to accept them, not only in western, but through out the societies around the globe. These endeavors, in fact, were at the best tolerated but never be embraced. A certain form of Calvinism as well as some sects of Christians during sixteen and seventeen centuries setup a movement of reforms by reinterpreting religious ideology which brought major changes in the ethos of business and industry as well as having its impacts to the people who had accepted the modified ethics of religion in particular and society in general. At this point of reference, a positive condition for entrepreneurial works had emerged which led the capitalistic development. Henceforth, religious constrains gradually begun with lasting their luster and control over the society, soonly, in persuasion of economic action, religious grip had been weakening. Hence, such a social condition had emerged where entrepreneurship to generate capital had become independent variable. Hear, Weber demonstrates changes in cultural values and belief as the key of the development of capitalism among various social groups with their own world views (Bendix, 1960: 258-62). In early work, Weber gives much stress on entrepreneurship as the skillful direction of enterprises which corresponds to opportunities in market situation for making profit than the personality of an individual entrepreneur.

Box 15.2: Entrepreneurship and Capitalism

Interestingly, Weber's contribution on entrepreneurship and development of capitalism, which appeared in his political and sociological writings from 1910 onwards, clearly indicates that Weber shifted his idea of entrepreneurship to bureaucrats. Weber, in this context, argues that as soon as society becomes more rationalized, bureaucracy dominates both enterprise as well as state. In case, political bureaucracy succeeds in handling all of the economic activities, viz. by socialist kind of revolution, capitalistic development will be struck out and democratic system will be turned down by dictatorial system.

In a capitalist society, economic sector operates in coordination with political sector. Nevertheless, economy can be also shifted within, in a situation

when bureaucratic notions within the individual enterprises are permitted to takeover. In this respect, Weber had personal dilemma if it crystallizes, which is very likely, rent would replace profit, the economy will fall down and soonly, repressive political condition would emerge in the society. According to Weber entrepreneur is the only person in economic sector who can force to keep the bureaucracy at its proper place as entrepreneur has an extensive knowledge and experiences of the business organisation rather than bureaucrats. The above discussion raises a question: How to identify the routes by which entrepreneurial groups are guided into the business endeavors and capitalistic development in society? According to Weber, whose centre was protestant Europe, the Calvinist notion of the advisability to justifying one's faith in cosmic endeavors, with no exception, strengthened the choice of business as a profession. Nevertheless, at this juncture, Weber also felt a major influence of ascetic Protestantism was transformed leisurely, satisfying traditional capitalists who happened to acclimatize new beliefs into perpetuating, ever extending modern capitalists.

15.5 Contribution of Schumpeter

Schumpeter had looked different theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship at different points of his life span. He, in fact, used a variety of approaches including psychology, economic theory, economic history and sociology. It is worthy to note here that Schumpeter first propagated competent history of entrepreneurship in the economic theory. And in this regard, the history of economic thought has been influenced greatly by his approach which still dominates the academic field.

Although, Schumpeter followed versatility and multi-disciplinary approach, nevertheless, as evident by his writings, he never produced a concrete guidance for the behaviour of entrepreneurs as business schools have been formulating it. It is worthy to note here that Schumpeter repeatedly had pointed out that when ordinary economic behaviour is more or less automatic, the entrepreneur has always to think seriously over his/her action which is to be taken as entrepreneur is involved in doing something that is fundamentally new. This is such insight which seems to be very significant as when someone does something extraordinary new does not know how to proceed further, hence needs fresh guidance.

Reflection and Action 15.2

What is Schumpeters vision of an entrepreneur? Write down your answer.

The idea of capitalist process which is the key point in the Schumpeter economic theoretical analysis can be stated that circular flow, as developed by Schumpeter, is disturbed and transformed by the innovators and their imitators. Given to certain technical economic conditions, the business begins to make profit, even when the market prices fall as a consequence of increased output. Here it is important that aggressive entrepreneur breaking into the placid circular flow, armed with nothing will, strengthen the idea of innovation, his/her success against obstacles of established firms, their forced liquidation or adaptation, is the key point on which Schumpeter interacted to a versatility through out his career. Schumpeter's first effort to develop the theory of entrepreneur can be traced out in the theory of economic development. In this pioneer work, he tried to formulate a completely new economic theory and paid a bit little attention what earlier economists had

accomplished. In this respect, his argument was that all significant changes in the economy are initiated by the entrepreneur, and that changes then gradually work at their own through the economic system, that is the business cycle. Schumpeter also regarded that his idea of endogenously generated change, as opposed to change induced from exogenous forces, not only applicable to economic, but to all social phenomena and they could be conceptualised as consisting of two types of activities, on the one hand there were creative and innovative activities, while on the other repetitive and mechanical activities. The second edition of the *theory of economic organization* was published after the one and half decades later, in which Schumpeter made his argument more logical, systematised it and broaden its implications. After thirteen years, an other his work "Business cycle" came up in which the carried further and here he had described entrepreneurship in much technical sense. When we think of Schumpeter theory of entrepreneur, we simply mean entrepreneurship as innovation. And perhaps the point on which Schumpeter speaks rather directly of the entrepreneur, his main bulk of his work represents an attempt to develop many economic theories viz. interest, capital, credit, profit and business cycle by interconnecting them to a theory of entrepreneurship. By doing so, he asserts that entrepreneurship can be defined as the making of a new combination of already existing materials, and forces; that entrepreneurship related of making of innovations, as opposed to inventions; and that no one is an entrepreneur forever, only when he/ she is doing the innovative activity.

Box 15.3: Schumpeter's Typology of Entrepreneurs

The typology given by him in the theory of economic development related to the practical implications, among them, the first has gained much popularity due to its operationalisation ability of the behaviour of entrepreneurs. These three typologies can be summarised as follow: (1) the introduction of new goods; (2) the introduction of new mode of production; (3) the initiating of new market; (4) innovating a new source of supply of raw materials; and (5) the creation of a new industrial organisation. Schumpeter's second typology is also very much popular as it is related with the motivation of entrepreneur and there are three important elements which motivates the entrepreneur: first, the dream and will to find out a private kingdom; secondly, the will to conquer; and thirdly, the joy of creating something (Schumpeter, (1934) 1961: 93).

Only money is not sufficient to motivate an entrepreneur, as he expresses that entrepreneurs are definitely not economic men in theoretical sense ([1946] 1991: 408). He goes to the extent by saying in the theory of economic development; that his idea related to the motivation of the entrepreneur easily comes in the field of psychology and thus has no scope in economic theory. During the last decade of his career, Schumpeter's views, as evident in his writings, shifted from economic theory to sociology and economic history. His work on Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1942) is a sociological contribution, as in this work, his focus of inquiry is on the institutional structure of society where he analyses the entrepreneurial function and concludes that a number of institutional factors are weakening entrepreneurship and contributing to stagnation of capitalism as a social system. And people are more prone to change resulting lesser opposition to entrepreneurship. As a routine, the big enterprises, through a specialised team are beginning to develop innovative technology. Hence, capitalism has

such notion where society rationalizes and demystifies along with entrepreneurship.

15.6 Studies on Entrepreneur other than Weber

The studies on entrepreneurship have not much attracted the attention of practitioner of the discipline, nonetheless, a few studies have been extended in this direction over a period of time. As it is an established fact that sociology has been influenced very much with its theory of social change and innovation. And as such, this theory might be meaningful to analyse entrepreneurship in sociological frame. Durkham's notion about change of society can be stated in generalised form: more the population density, more the demand, more the division of labour and specialisation occur in the society to fulfill its demand ([1912] 1965). What specialisation of work is meant for, it can best be explicated that an entrepreneur throughout his/her carrier innovates the avenues for professionalisation and expertisation of work to succeed in the field of its own. In this respect Durkham's idea of specialisation of division of labour itself hints a theoretical genesis of entrepreneurship. And perhaps, this social condition during eighteen century might have led French revolution and industrial resolution which seemly was a beginning phase of the development of capitalism in European society. Analysis of entrepreneurship appeared even in the writings of modern sociologists. In this context, mention can be made to the work of Merton, in which he states that most of the discoveries had taken place accidentally. In this connection, it is difficult to elicit the causes, further in another article, he suggests there may be inadvertent interrelation between entrepreneur and crime. In a society where much stress is given to the direction of achieving desirable goal and people struggle for it, however, there also would be an avenue for goal attainment. This kind of social situation, as Merton says, compels to its member to render efforts in searching out new avenue to succeed. Here, innovation is unavoidable phenomenon, but there is also another situation, the members who do not succeed in goal attainment, they are likely to adopt unfair means to succeed which will lead the crime and deviance in the society (1968). In contrast to other discipline, sociologists have looked entrepreneurship in comparative frame (Cardoso, 1967). Such kind of analysis has been done by Lipset (1967), he finds out that intensity of economic development depends on cultural values and entrepreneurship in a given society. He compares two cultures of Latin America and North America. In Latin America Iberian, culture is dominating through its notion of discouragement of manual labour practices, commerce and industry. While the situation of North America, is such where Puritan values laid emphasis on work and money making as a vocation and was predominated in most of the parts of United States and hence resulted the economic development. In Latin America when Iberian values was replaced by the landed property and it had become the symbol of success, at this juncture also economic development had taken place in Latin America.

15.7 Conclusion

What does the idea about entrepreneurship and theory of capitalism, as given by different scholars in preceding pages, lead upto? Now it is time to review the main thrust of the theoretical contribution and its applicability. There is nothing doubtful that the contribution of Weber is of immense in the theoretical sense but it seems weaker in its practical implications. It

represents just social science as sciencing. In spite of this weakness, Weber's idea can be taken as point of departure for developing and shaping its practical applicability to entrepreneur with reference to the capitalist development. And Weber's initial definition of entrepreneurship may facilitate in extending Schumpeter's individualistic entrepreneurship into a sociological perspective. The idea, for survival of entrepreneurship; modern enterprise or an organization which is able to generate chances of profits; is essential condition, can be commented as that only creative personality loaded with bundles of ideas is not sufficient for survival. Weber's notion of methodical work and money making as vocation as they have been demonstrated in *The Protestant Ethic* raises an important question: How far elements of methodical work and money making articulate in the present dynamic situation of globalisation and liberalisation? This is such a question which perhaps needs modification of the theory of entrepreneurship and capitalism.

15.8 Further Reading

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Freedom and Liberty

Contents

Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit you should be able to understand

▫ the concepts of Liberty and Freedom from the early thinkers

▫ also provide different theoretical standpoints on Liberty and Freedom as a political value

▫ assess the debate on freedom and liberty

16.1 Introduction

Before we discuss Liberty, it will be useful to distinguish the value of liberty from other closely associated terms — 'Liberalism' and 'Libertarianism'. Liberalism signals a cluster of political ideals advocated (and put into practice) within a tradition of political thought and political activity. Major contributors to the literature of liberalism include thinkers as diverse as Locke, Montesquieu, the Federalists, Constant, de Tocqueville, J S Mille, T H Green, Karl Popper, P Hayek and latterly, John Rawls and Joseph Raz. Probably the only thing that unites members of this list is that they all subscribe to a strong value of individual liberty. For some, the heart of liberalism is captured in Locke's claim that all men are born free and equal; others shudder at the commitment to equality. For still others, liberalism requires the opportunity to participate in democratic institutions; some liberals discount this, insisting that democracy represents a separate or subordinate value, or no value at all, or even a threat to liberty.

Key liberal themes include the right to private property and advocacy of the rule of law as well as defence of the traditional freedoms — freedom of speech and artistic expression, freedom of association, religious freedom, freedom to pursue the work of one's choice and freedom to participate in political decision procedures.

Libertarianism is the theoretical stance of one who strictly limits the competence of government to collective defence, the protection of negative rights, rights of non-interference, and enforcement of contracts.

Liberty in one sense can be focussed as a political value. It is also claimed that liberty is not a value-neutral concept, it is always normative, always accompanied by a positive ethical charge. Thus to describe a condition as one of liberty is to attribute a positive value to it and hence to begin making out a case for it. The distinction between liberty and freedom is also important. The concept of freedom is thinner than that of liberty and carries less evaluative baggage

John Stuart Mill begins his essay, On Liberty, with a disclaimer in the first sentence: "The subject of this Essay is not the so-called Liberty of the Will, so unfortunately opposed to the misnamed doctrine of philosophical Necessity; but Civil, or Social Liberty".

Box 16.1: Democracy and Civil Liberty

Mill may be right to separate these philosophical questions. His specific objective limits the range of the concept of liberty, since it ought to be an open question whether the question of liberty is exhausted when we have investigated 'the nature and limits of the power, which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual'. Mill imposes this latter restriction deliberately because he believes that, in his day, democracy poses sharp threats to civil liberty. He has in mind the possibility of majority tyranny and the levelling spirit of democracy, which may lead to an intolerance of social experimentation and personal eccentricity. He believed in de Tocqueville's reports of democracy at work in America; give a measure of power to everyone at the town meeting and conformity will soon become a parochial priority. These dangers are real, but liberty may require democratic institutions just as surely as democratic institutions requires strong liberties.

16.2 Berlin's and The Republican Theory

We will now turn to an analysis of liberty and freedom.

Isaiah Berlin : Negative and Positive Philosophy

Isaiah Berlin's Inaugural Lecture, "Two Concepts of Liberty', has proved to be one of the seminal contributions to political philosophy in the 20th C. Berlin distinguishes negative and positive liberty and, on his account, these different senses of liberty are elicited as the answers to two different questions.

If we ask 'what is the area within which the subject — a person or group of persons — is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference from other person?" we characterize an agent's negative liberty. 'Political liberty' in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others'. If we ask instead, 'what or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that? We aim to describe the agent's positive liberty. This is summarized later as 'the freedom which consists in being one's own master.

Negative Liberty

The clearest exponent of the simplest version of negative liberty was Thomas Hobbes, who defined a free man quite generally as, 'he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to'. Negative liberty is often glossed as the absence of coercion, where coercion is understood as the deliberate interference of other agents. Negative liberty of the Hobbesian kind that is compromised by coercive threats as well as other modes of prevention, is often contrasted with theories which imply that mere inabilities inhibit liberty. This point is made clear by this phrase: 'It is not lack of freedom (for people) not to fly like an eagle or swim like a whale'.

Berlin insists that we should distinguish between the value of (negative) liberty and the conditions, which make the exercise of liberty possible. Thus there may be freedom of press in a country where most citizens are illiterate. For most, the condition, which would give point to the freedom — literacy — does not obtain. In these circumstances, Berlin would insist that illiteracy does not amount to lack a lack of freedom. Clearly, something is amiss in a society, which fails to educate its citizenry to a level where they can take advantage of central freedoms, but that something need not be a lack of freedom. A basic education, which includes literacy may be an intrinsic good, or it may be a human right. Its provision may be a matter of justice, its denial, transparent injustice. But however this state of affairs is described, we should distinguish a lack of freedom from conditions under which it is hard or impossible to exercise a formal liberty.

The important point Berlin wants us to recognize is that different fundamental values may conflict. The demands of justice or security may require truncation of liberty, or vice versa, in circumstances of moral dilemma or irresoluble tragedy.

Box 16.2: Berlin and Positive Liberty

Isaiah Berlin defines positive liberty as follows: the 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life an decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them. This is at least part of what I mean when I say that I am rational, and that it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest of the world. I wish above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not.

The analytical summary of Berlin's historical sketch of liberty is as given below:

a) Self-Control and Self-Realisation

This involves my working on my own desires – ordering, strengthening, eliminating them – in line with a conception of what it is right or good for me to do or be. This is a complex notion, with its heart in a sophisticated account of freedom of action. In modern times the development of this account can be traced through Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel. It has re-emerged in the recent work of Harry Frankfurt and Charles Tylor. We are well

used to the idea that we exhibit self-control when we resist temptation. Freedom of action consists in our ability to appraise the desires which we prompt us to act and to decide whether or not to satisfy them. On this account, the paradigm of freedom consists in our going against what we most want, doing what we think best. But as Hegel pointed out, the best of all worlds for the free agent is that in which what, after due reflection, we believe is the right thing to do is also what we discover we most want.

b) Paternalism

Suppose I am not able to exercise this self-control. I may be ignorant of what is best for me. I may not understand the full value of alternatives. I may not understand the full value of alternatives. Like the child who does not wish to take the nasty-tasting (but life-saving) medicine, I mistake my real interests. In such circumstances, the wise parent will not be squeamish. She will force the medicine down. Might it not be justifiable, then, for you to exercise the control over me that I am unable to achieve or sustain? Might not freedom require whatever control over me that you can exercise – absent my own powers of self-control? This thought is particularly apt where your paternalistic intervention creates for me or sustains conditions of autonomous choice that my own activities thwart.

c) Social Self Control

But if I exercise my freedom through self-control, and if you promote my freedom by appropriate paternalistic intervention, may not my freedom be further enhanced by institutional measures that I endorse? In the Republic of Rousseau's Social Contract, citizens achieve moral and political liberty by enacting laws, backed by coercive sanctions, which apply to themselves as well as to others. If, as an individual, I cannot resist a temptation, which will likely cause me harm, wouldn't it be a wise stratagem to devise some social mechanism, which will bolster my resolve? If I realise that the threat of punishment against me will keep me on the straight and narrow path which wisdom alone cannot get me to follow, shouldn't I institute and accept social restraints which are more forceful than my unaided moral powers? And in doing so, don't I expand my true freedom?

d) State Servitude

An unwise citizen, unable to exercise immediate self control and insufficiently far-seeing to enact or endorse devices of social coercion, can nevertheless attain freedom indirectly and at second hand if the state effects the necessary control, notwithstanding his disapproval or lack of participation. The state can control us in the service of our real interests – and thereby make us free.

16.3 The Value of Freedom

Marx's conception of 'freedom' is in fact quite close to the notion of autonomous self-control taken by Durkheim, and is definitely not to be identified with the utilitarian view. The words 'free' and 'rational' are as closely associated in Marx's writings as they are in that of Hegel. Hegel dismissed the notion, implicit in utilitarianism, that a man is free to the degree that he can do whatever his inclination lead him to desire. The man in the street thinks he is free if it is open to him to act as he pleases, but his very arbitrariness implies that he is not free. Freedom is not the exercise of egoism, but is in fact opposed to it. A course of action is 'arbitrary'

rather than 'free' if it simply involves irrational choice among alternative courses of action with which the individual is liberated. An animal, which chooses, in a situation of adversity, to fight rather than to run from an enemy, does not thereby act 'freely'. To be free is to be autonomous, and thus not impelled by either external or internal forces beyond rational control; this is why freedom is a human prerogative, because only man, through his membership of society is able to control not only the form, but also the content of volition. In Hegel's view, this is possible given the identification of the individual with the rational ideal. For Marx, it presupposes concrete social re-organization, the setting up of a communist society.

Box 16.3: Individual and Society

The position of the individual in society will be analogous to that characteristic, for instance of the scientists within the scientific community. A scientist who accepts the norms, which define scientific activity is not less free than one who deliberately rejects them; on the contrary, by being a member of the scientific community, he is also to participate in a collective enterprise which allows him to enlarge, and to creatively employ, his own individual capacities. In this way, acceptance of moral requisites is not the acceptance of alien constraint, but is the recognition of the rational.

This is not to say that there are no important differences in the respective standpoints of Marx and Durkheim which can be regarded as of 'ahistorical' signficance. Durkheim is emphatic that the individual personality is overwhelmingly influenced by the characteristics of the form of society in which he exists and into which he is socialised. But he does not accept a complete historical relativism in this respect: every man, no matter whether 'primitive' or 'civilised', is a homo duplex, in the sense that there is an opposition in every individual between egoistic impulses and those which have a 'moral' connotation. Marx does not adopt such a psychological model; in Marx's conception, there is no asocial basis for such an implicit antagonism between the individual and society. For Marx, 'The individual is the social being... Individual human life and species life are not different things. The egoistic opposition between the individual and society which is found in a particularly marked form in bourgeois society is an outcome of the development of the division of labour. Durkheim's identification of the duality of human personality, on the other hand is founded upon the supposition that the egoism of the infant, deriving from the biological drives with which he is born, can never be reversed or eradicated completely by the subsequent moral development of the child.

Both Marx and Durkheim stress the historical dimension in the conditioning of human needs. For Durkheim, egoism becomes a threat to social unity only within the context of a form of society in which human sensibilites have become greatly expanded: 'all evidence compels us to expect our effort in the struggle between the two beings within us to increase with the growth of civilisation.

Reflection and Action 16.2

Describe the egoistic opposition between individual and society. Can this be reversed or eradicated?

Unless what we want is itself of some value, the freedom to pursue it is just about worthless. So, freedom of thought and discussion is valuable because

thought and discussion is valuable. In the most impressive recent work on freedom, Joseph Raz suggests that freedom is of value since it is defined as a condition of personal autonomy.

a) Freedom of Action

To act freely, reason must be brought to bear on my desires. Important elements of free action can be traced in Locke, Rousseau, Kant and most thoroughly in Hegel's Philosophy of Right. It captures one strand of thinking about autonomous action – we are free when we are in control of what we do, acting against what, phenomenologically, are our strongest desires; when this is called for, by reason or morality or the ethical demands of communities, we recognize as authoritative.

b) Autonomy

The value of freedom can be swiftly inferred. It is the value of getting what we want, doing as we please. Thus the value of freedom is instrumental; it amounts to the value of whatever we want, which our freedom is instrumental in enabling us to get. If we are unfree in a given respect, we either cannot get, or can get only at too great a cost or risk (of punishment, generally) whatever is the object of our desire. This account of the value of freedom has the great virtue of being simple and straightforward. Moreover, it enables us to rank freedoms in respect of their value to us. This will be a function of the value of the activities that freedom permits. The more important is the object of desire, the more important the freedom to get it, the more serious the restriction in cases where we are made unfree.

We can grant the Kantian autonomy is exercised under conditions of freedom, which permit agents significant opportunities to work out what is the right thing to do, but if this is the core value of freedom we may find that freedom does not provide the best circumstances in which autonomy may be developed.

c) Moral Freedom

On Rousseau's account, this is the freedom, which is attained by those who can control their own desires. It is developed further in Kant's account of autonomous willing which stresses how we bring to bear our resources of rational deliberation in the face of our heteronomous desires, those desires which we are caused to suffer by the nexus of our (internal) human nature and (external) nature. If we follow reason's guidance we shall act freely, willing actions which it must be possible in principle for all to accomplish laws which all must be able to follow.

The laws, which keep us and our fellow citizens on what we recognize to be, the straight and narrow path of duty do not infringe our liberty. This is a dangerous argument, and the danger comes from two different quarters. First, there is the obvious threat that others may determine what our duty requires and then regiment us to perform it. This danger is avoided so long as we insist that the moral liberty, which is achieved by state coercion be the product of political liberty, of democratic institutions. The second threat is that democratic majorities may get it wrong, proscribing under penalty of imprisonment and like measures of punishment activities, which are innocent. Since the decisions of democratic bodies do not of themselves constitute verdicts on what is or is not morally acceptable, this is a permanent possibility. The pursuit of moral liberty may land us in political chains.

> **Box 16.4: Limits on Democracy**
>
> There are a number of complimentary answers…. The first is that we should buttress our specification of the institutions, which promote political liberty with some condition that sets limits on the competence of the democratic decision procedures. The second, an explicit implication of Mill's principle, is a public recognition that the wrongs which may be prohibited consistently with liberty do not include wrongs which citizens may do to themselves alone — that is the issue of paternalism.

d) Toleration

If there is a such thing as a liberal virtue, it is toleration. But as one commentator said 'it seems to be at once necessary and impossible'. Toleration is necessary because folk who live together may find that there are deep differences between their moral beliefs, which cannot be settled by argument from agreed premises. It is impossible because of the circumstances of deep conflict which call for the exercise of toleration are all too often described in terms of the obtuseness and stubbornness of the conflicting parties. These differences, historically have been of a kind that causes savages conflict. The point of disagreement may seem trivial to a neutral observer. Toleration requires one not to interfere in conduct which one believes to be morally wrong.

For instance, think of a state with majority and minority religions, or more generally, one with religious divisions and where the power to legislate is in the hands of one religious community alone. Should the state tolerate those who do wrong in the minds of the legislators by breaking the dietary laws their religion prescribes? Briefly it may be argued that morality has a universal dimension, which is belied by one who conceives its source to be an authoritative religious texts. Of course, the believer will affirm the universal authority of the prescriptions – one can't expect such problems to be so swiftly settled - but the direction of liberal argument can be easily grasped.

16.4 Free States and Free Citizens

Rousseau says that in the state of nature, our freedom derives from our free will, our capacity to resist the desires which press us, together with our status as independent creatures, neither subject to the demands of others nor dependent on them to get what we want. As contractors, we shall be satisfied with nothing less than that social state, which best approximates to this natural condition. Natural freedom is lost, but the thought of it gives us a moral benchmark by which we can appraise the institutions of contemporary society. In society, a measure of freedom can be recovered along three dimensions: moral freedom (we have already discussed), democratic freedom and civil freedom.

a) Democratic Freedom

The essence of the case for democracy as a dimension of freedom is simple: democracy affords its citizens the opportunity to participate in making the decisions, which as laws, will govern their conduct. For Kant, autonomous action consists in living in accordance with the laws, which one has determined for oneself as possible for each agent to follow. Democracy represents a rough political analogue of this model: freedom consists in living in accordance with laws one has created as applicable to all citizens, oneself included.

Berlin argued that democracy is a very different ideal to liberty — major decisions can threaten liberty, as J.S Mill argued. It is a mistake to view this

consideration, plausible though it may be, as decisive. Any system other than democracy will deny citizens the opportunity to engage in an activity that many regard as valuable. Democratic activity gives us the chance to assert that we are free of claimants of authority. Democracy may be necessary to freedom, but it carries its own distinctive threats.

b) Civil Liberty

Citizens who value liberty and express this through their participation in democratic institutions which liberty requires will, in all consistency, be reluctant to interfere in the lives of their fellows, whether by law or less formal mechanisms. Their deep concern to establish institutions, which empower every one will make them cautious about introducing measures which constrain individual choice. Accepting the necessity of democratic institutions and their associated freedoms, valuing strongly the opportunities these offered for citizens to embody their various conceptions of the good life in constitutional and prescriptive laws, they will be hesitant to constrain their own pursuit of these values. To the rational man, it is a miserable thought that others may defy the canons of rationality. Just as we are prepared to approve external constraints on our decision-making, recognising our vulnerability to temptation, so, too, must we be prepared to adopt institutions, which guard against the worst of human folly.

16.5 Conclusion

Berlin's work on liberty represented a notable advance on the prevailing standards of philosophical correctness. He showed that an important ethical concept is susceptible of (at least) two, and possibly two hundred, different analyses. There is no one coherent way of thinking about liberty; there are at least two — and these amount, each of them, to rich traditions; each tradition dissolving into disparate components which challenge fellow contenders for the torch of 'the best way of thinking about the value of liberty'. If there are many ways of thinking clearly about liberty, as about democracy or justice, the important question concerns which way we are to select as most apt to characterise judgements about the importance of liberty as a political value. The accounts of selection are complex and following are the chief characteristics.

Basically agents are free when they are not hindered in their pursuit of what they take to be the good life. Hindrances are to be construed widely. In a political, or more widely social context, they will include laws backed by sanctions as well as the coercive instruments of positive morality. But individuals can also claim to be unfree when governments in particular fail to empower them in sufficient measure to attain levels of accomplishment which are the necessary preconditions of a life which is authentically their own. Political institutions can foster liberty on this capacious understanding in a range of ways. A sound theory of liberty should recognise the Janus-face of the criminal law in particular. It can serve as a protection, demarcating with the force of sanctions the boundaries which freedom requires if the pursuit of the good life is to be safe within them. Governments and citizens individually should be modest in respect of both their ambitions and effectiveness concerning the likelihood of their interference promoting the good of their helpless and obdurate fellow citizens.

16.6 Further Reading

Giddens, Anthony. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*. CUP, 1994.

John Lechte (2004). *Fifty Great Contemporary Thinkers - From Structuralalism to Postmodernity.*

Unit 17
Alienation

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you will be able to

▫ understand the concept of alienation and how it is applied in analysing the modern society

▫ study explain aspects of alienation like objectification

17.1 Introduction

The concept alienation describes the estrangement of individuals from one another, or from a specific situation or process. It is central to the writings of Karl Marx and normally associated with Marxist sociology.   There are philosophical, sociological and psychological dimensions to the argument. Hegel provided the philosophical means to overcome the Kantian dualism of 'is' and 'ought' since for Hegel, the actual was always striving to become the ideal.   The passage of self-creating, self-knowing idea through history, its alienation through externalization and objectification and its reappropriation through knowledge, provided Marx with his revolutionary imperative. Turning Hegel on his head and rooting his own ideas in a "materialist vision, Marx argued that humanity is lost in the unfolding historical epochs.   Thus Marx argued that with the advent of communism, there would be a complete return of individuals to themselves as social beings.

Sociological dimension of the term relates more to his argument that estrangement is a consequence of social structures which oppress people, denying them their essential humanity.

17.2 De-Humanisation of Labour

We will now outline how labour is 'de-humarized' in the process of production

a) Theory of Surplus Value

Following Adam Smith, Marx distinguished in a commodity, two aspects: they have a use-value and an exchange value. A commodity is an article, which can satisfy one or the other human need, is a use value. But a commodity is not just a useful article, which is to be produced and sold in the market, but to be exchanged with other commodities. How to measure the exchange-value of commodities which have different use-values? What do wheat and linen have in common? One is produced by a peasant, other by a weaver. They are the products of different types of useful labour. What they have in common is that they are both products of human labour in general, what Marx calls "abstract human labour". On both products a certain amount of

human labour has been spent. That determines their exchange-value. The exchange-value or simply the value, as distinguished from the use-value, consists of the abstract labour incorporated in the commodity. The measure is not the time which the individual labourer may have spent which may be above or below average, but the average time needed on a given level of productivity, what Marx calls the "socially necessary labour-time".

Capitalist production becomes possible when along with other commodities labour-power can be bought as a commodity. As any other commodity labour-power has a use-value for the buyer and an exchange-value for the seller. For the buyer, (the capitalist), it has the use-value that it can work (produce). He uses, he consumes it for this purpose and pays the price — strange enough only afterwards - in the form of wages. For the worker his labour power has only an exchange value. He cannot use it for his own purposes, because he has no means of production. But he can sell it in order to make a living. The exchange value is determined as in the case of every other commodity by the labour-time necessary for its production or reproduction; that means, in this case by the cast of the "means of subsistence" needed to maintain the worker and his children, the future workers. The level of subsistence and of essential needs varies from situation to situation according to the level of development and other factors.

The wage covers only what is needed to maintain the labourer, his value. But what he produces is more than that. The difference is called the surplus-value. The capitalist appropriates the surplus. To understand this concept of surplus-value, it may be helpful to have a look at the historical development. In early history people produced hardly enough for their own subsistence. As soon as they were able to increase their productivity and to produce a surplus — i.e. through cattle breeding instead of hunting — the question arose how this surplus was going to be used. In course of time, it released a section of the people from work for their own subsistence like chiefs, and priests. They became the ruling class. Thereafter, one can analyse the labour of the producers as partly "necessary labour", i.e. labour for their own subsistence, and partly "surplus-labour", i.e. labour to maintain the ruling class. In the middle-ages, the serfs worked three days on their own lands for their own subsistence and three days on the lands of the feudal lord without being paid for it. With that surplus-labour they produced a social surplus which was appropriated by the ruling class. This appropriation can take place in different forms, in the form of kind - as in the case of share-cropping or in the form of money (rent). In the case of money, it is surplus value.

The capitalist tries to increase the rate of surplus value, which can be achieved in two ways: absolute and relative surplus value. Absolute surplus value is produced by "prolongation of the working day". By such prolongation the time of surplus-labor is expanded. This method is especially applied in the earlier stages of capitalism. We find it still in the unorganised sector of industry in India.

> **Box 17.1: Relative Surplus**
>
> Relative surplus value arises from the "curtailment of the necessary labour-time, in other words from the increase of productivity. If a worker produces more in one hour than he did before, then the time needed to cover the supply of his means of subsistence (necessary labour-time) is shortened.

This increase of productivity is pursued in many ways, including increasing supervision and discipline, piece-rate wages, and above all technological innovations. Relative surplus value becomes dominant in fully developed capitalism. It presupposes the accumulation of capital, which is needed for further mechanisation and expanding scale of production.

In the early stages of capitalism we find the extraction of surplus value without the impressive and conspicuous technological revolution which characterises the later stage of capitalist development. The level of technology is still more or less the same as in pre-capitalist society. Most other aspects of society are yet un-changed or only slowly changing. But one decisive thing has changed: *the labour process is subordinated to capital*. The labourer is no longer an independent producer or a serf tied to the soil. He is under the control of the capitalist in one way or the other. Marx calls this the "formal subsumption of labour under capital". Once capital has established its hold and has accumulated sufficiently it may proceed to the "real subsumption of labour" when it starts transforming the process of labour, re-organising it and bringing it on a new technological level.

It may be noted here that this distinction is relevant to the on-going debate about the dominant mode of production in India. Whereas capitalist farmers in the Punjab get their crops sprayed with pesticides from small aeroplanes, there are sharecroppers in other parts of India making out a meagre existence in ways, which seem to belong to a pre-capitalist form of society. But the appearance may be misleading. Even where no technological changes have taken place and where the old society still is alive culturally and ideologically, capital may already be in charge economically, through the formal subsumption of labour, extracting absolute surplus value.

> ### Reflection and Action 17.1
>
> What mode of production is used in the Indian state: discuss and make notes in your dairy.

The key to Marx's critique of capitalism is his theory of surplus-value which explains how capital grows by consuming living labour. Because only labour power produces surplus value, its exploitation is the basis of the capitalist system. But labour power is not only an economic factor, as it appears in the calculations of the capitalists. Labour is not only "variable capital". Labour power is provided by living human beings who have their own needs and aspirations. Capitalism has separated labour and the satisfaction of human aspirations. Labour-power is treated as a commodity in exchange for which workers may satisfy some of their most immediate needs. But for Marx labour itself is the most essential characteristic of human life. Without it, human kind not only cannot survive, it even cannot become human. Human labour is imaginative, it is conscious and not instinctual. "We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises its structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement".

Human labour is social. It is self-realisation through the production for

others and with others. Isolated individuals cannot survive on their own. Productive interaction with nature requires co-operation, division of labour and exchange. In the process, the human species realises itself. One might even say that the meaning of labour lies in this self-realisation of the human species. As a social process human labour creates society in its various forms. But as such it is also conditioned by society in its different forms. In the course of history the development of class societies threatens the human quality of labour. The climax of this threat is reached in capitalism, the main target of Marx's critique.

Box 17.2: Concept of Alienation

The capitalist mode of production has increased the productivity of human labour on a gigantic scale. But it has done so at the cost of the producers. They are forced to sell their labour-powers to the capitalist. The meaning of all his productive activity lies for the worker no longer in the activity itself but in the wage which, he receives at the end of a day. Life is being active, creative, and productive. But the activity of the workers does not belong to himself, but to the capitalist. His life starts only when the work is over. He works only for getting the means of life, not for life itself. That is what Marx calls Alienation.

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b) Emergence of Classes

When humanity first developed fire, it took thousands of years to complete the process — being able to turn heat back into motion. The same kind of process can be seen in the development of classes. When humans began to organise themselves in accordance with their relations of production (the division of labour), classes in society formed based on the different positions and roles humans found and created themselves in. What once was a society with little or no class structure, i.e. tribal or nomadic society, became a society that split and divided itself into a diversity of classes fufilling a broad range of productive roles.

The motion of nature, dialectics, applies in class development as it applies in all things. As the productive forces of humans increased, and class distinctions deepened and divided further, soon the advancement of the productive forces reached such heights that certain classes were no longer necessary. The small craftsperson and shop owner were pushed out of existence by the advancement of modern industries that could produce a much greater quantity at much lower cost.

Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels explained the processes of change brought forth by Industrial revolution just beginning to unfold in a particular direction:

"Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the over-looker, and, above all, in the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is".

"The increasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon, the workers begin to form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there, the contest breaks out into riots.

"Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lie not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by Modern Industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes (Marx: *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*).

This "alienation" [caused by private property] can, of course, only be abolished given two practical premises. For it to become an "intolerable" power, i.e. a power against which men make a revolution, it must necessarily have rendered the great mass of humanity "property-less". And at the same time should have produced, the contradiction of an existing world of wealth and culture. Both these conditions presuppose a great increase in productive power, a high degree of its development.

17.3 Alienation as a Process

In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (EPM) published in 1844, Marx analyses various aspects of alienation.

1) Firstly, the worker is alienated from the product of his labour. The product in which he expresses and realises himself does not belong to him. It is appropriated by the capitalists and sold on the market. With realisation of surplus-value capital grows, and with capital the alien power which controls and dominates the life of the worker. The more he works, the better he produces, the stronger becomes this alien power of capital.

2) Under the capitalist conditions the worker is alienated from the act of producing itself. The most human activity does no longer belong to the producer himself. It has become a commodity sold and bought on the market, the commodity of labour power. The buyer of this commodity, the capitalist, determines what the worker does and how he has to do it.

3) Capitalist production alienates the worker from his being a member of the human species and from his humanity, as being a fellow being with other human beings. His social activity, production turns into a means for his individual existence, for earning a wage. This implies his alienation from other human beings with whom he competes for scarce jobs.

> **Box 17.3: Wages price and profit**
>
> Marx documents in detail how alienation takes place, both in the extraction of absolute surplus-value and in the extraction of relative surplus-value, both in the lengthening of the working day and in the technical division of labour and mechanisation pushed forward by capital. Time is the room of

human development, as Marx puts it in "Wages, Price and Profit". Being forced to sell his labour-power the worker has not time to be and to develop himself as a human being.

a) Features of Alienation

Marx's exposition of the functioning and prospects of capitalist economy cannot be studied in isolation from his anthropological ideas and his philosophy of history. His theory is a general one embracing the whole of human activity in its various interdependent spheres. His successive writings culminating in capital itself are more and more elaborate versions of the same thought which may be expressed as follows:

"we live in an age in which the dehumanisation of man, that is to say the alienation between him and his own works, is growing to a climax which must end in a revolutionary upheaval; this will originate from the particular interest of the class which has suffered the most from dehumanisation, but its effect would be to restore humanity to all mankind".

The fundamental novelty of *capital* consists in two points, which entail wholly different view of capitalist society from that of the classical economists:

a) what the worker sells is not his labour but labour power, and that labour has two aspects – abstract and concrete. Exploitation consists in the worker selling his labour power and thus divesting himself of his own essence; the labour process and its results become hostile and alien, deprivation of humanity instead of fulfillment.

b) Marx, having discovered the dual nature of labour as expressed in the opposition between exchange value and use value, defines capitalism as a system in which the sole object of production is to increase exchange-value without limit. The whole of human activity is subordinated to a non-human purpose, the creation of something that man cannot as such assimilate for only use-value can be assimilated. The whole community is thus enslaved to its own products, abstractions which present themselves to it as an external, alien power. The deformation of consciousness and the alienation of the political superstructure are consequences of the basic alienation of labour – which, however, is not a 'mistake' on history's part but a necessary precondition of the future society of free beings in control of the vital process of their own lives.

In this way, *Capital* may be regarded as a logical continuation of Marx's earlier views.

1) Alienation is nothing but a process in which man deprives himself of what he truly is, of his own humanity.

2) Marx unlike Hegel did not identify alienation with externalisation, i.e. the labour process whereby human strength and skill are converted into new products. It would be absurd to speak of abolishing alienation in this sense, since in all imaginable circumstances, men will have to expend energy to produce the things they need. Hegel identified alienation with externalisation and could therefore conceive man's final reconciliation with the world by way of abolishing the objectivity of the object.

To Marx however, the fact that people 'objectivize' their powers does not mean they become poorer by whatever they produce; on the contrary, labour in itself is an affirmation and not a denial of humanity being the chief form of the unending process of man's self-creation. It is only in a society ruled by private property and division of labour that productive activity is a source of misery and dehumanisation. And labour destroys the workman instead of enriching him. When alienated labour is done away with, people will continue to externalise and 'objectivize' their power, but they will be able to assimilate the work of their hands as an expression of their collective ability.

17.4 Division of Labour

The other aspect of alienation is the de-humanisation of labour itself. This happens in the course of the new division of labour promoted by capitalism. Division of labour is not invented by capitalism. It developed at an early stage of history. It is at the same time the source of material and cultural progress and of human alienation. It increases the productivity of human labour, it make it possible to produce a surplus, which again is the necessary condition for the development of culture, art, politics, and also religion. The existence of philosophers and artists, priests, and kings is possible only on this fundamental principle of division of labour. But the progressive development of culture takes place at the cost of the direct producers. Their horizon narrows down, they get specialised and lose their relation to the process as a whole. The same philosophers, priests and kings monopolise the control over society as a whole. They enjoy the freedom, which is based on the understanding and control of the total process. The others lose this freedom. They are no longer responsible members of a tribe, but isolated villagers in a huge empire, or slaves without rights, or serfs in a feudal set-up. Their life gets more and more dominated by alien forces beyond their control. In this way all division of labour lead to alienation.

Box 17.4: Capitalist Mode of Production

There is a fundamental difference between the division of labour in pre-capitalist societies and the new forms developed by capitalism. In pre-capitalist societies we can speak of a social division of labour. Various social and economic activities are divided between various crafts. It specializes the social production so that different crafts produce different commodities. But the capitalist mode of production while intensifying the social division of labour introduces also a technical division of labour which divides one particular craft, the production of one commodity into as many detail functions as possible and profitable. The weavers, carpenters, peasants of old produced different commodities. The industrial workers in capitalism have become detail labourers who individually no longer produce commodities but only collectively as part of a whole assembly of machines and workers. This process started with the co-operation of individual artisan, in one workshop under the control of an owner-capitalist. They still worked as before, producing the whole commodity. But it was the beginning of direction, control, management.

In the next stage of manufacture the technical division of labour begins. Each worker is assigned to a few operations on which he specialises. Out of this a hierarchy of labour-power develops from most skilled to unskilled. Management becomes more important. Apart from control it assumes more and more the function of planning and conceptualisation of the work. The workers have to execute the task assigned to them. But as long as they are skilled they have still a certain freedom and control within the limits of their function.

Thus in this period — 16th to 18th C — three fundamental changes in the character of productive work took place:

1) Capitalist management imposes strict discipline of labour through means of despotic control. The artisans of old had the freedom to choose their own rhythm and style of work. Once forced into workshop and manufacture they have to subordinate themselves to the will of the managing capitalist. To manage originally meant to train a horse in his paces, to cause him to do the exercises of the manager. And control is the central concept of all management.

2) Under capitalist management also that fundamental division develops which separates the conceptualisation and execution of the work. This is given with the development of the detail workers who is no longer related to the production of the whole.

3) The Capitalist drive for profit creates for the first time a large scale unskilled labour i.e. workers who for their lifetime are condemned to do cheap unskilled labour.

In the social division of labour, the producers may have been alienated from the whole society, but there is still a possibility of meaningful self-realisation in the work. In the technical division of labour, alienation involves the process of labour itself. The social division of labour, subdivides society, the technical division of labour subdivides humans.

Braverman shows that it is capitalism which first creates this scarcity of skills:

> "Every step in the labour process is divorced, so far as possible, from special knowledge and training and reduced to simple labour. Meanwhile, the relatively few persons for whom special knowledge and training are reserved are freed so far as possible from the obligations of simple labour. In this way, a structure is given to all labour processes that at its extreme polarizes those whose time is infinitely valuable and those whose time is worth almost nothing. This might even be called the general law of the capitalist division of labour."

a) Objectification

Marx analyses the impact of machinery and modern industry on labour in ch. XV of Capital I. He shows how the development of technology under capitalism is geared towards the maximum production of surplus value and how it transforms the worker on the basis of the capitalist division of labour in to a living appendage of a lifeless mechanism.

"In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the

instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow.   In manufacture the workmen are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes it mere living appendage".

The fundamental characteristic of machinery is that it removes the tool from the hands of the worker and fits it into a mechanism, which is moved independently from the worker. This opens new avenues for exploitation. And above all it leads to the further degradation of the worker by completing the "separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour".   Thus machinery becomes:

"for most the working population, the source not of freedom, but of enslavement, not of mastery, but of helplessness, and not of the broadening of the horizon of labour but of the confinement of the worker within a blind round of servile duties in which the machine appears as the embodiment of science and the worker as little or nothing".

Reflection and Action 17.3

Discuss the process of "objectification". What effect does this have on the production process? Think and note down your answer in your dairy.

Technically speaking it is the transformation of labour from processes based on skill to processes based upon science. That this process led to the degradation of the workers is not an unavoidable result of the development of science and technology, but it is the consequence of the subordination of science and technology to the purpose of capital. Marx repeatedly characterised the alienation of the worker who faces the gigantic machinery of modern, capitalist, industry, and who experiences his powerlessness in front of it, as the rule of dead labour over living labour. The worker does not see it like this. He sees the machinery as representing the wealth, the capital of the capitalist and the superior knowledge of the scientists compared to which he himself is poor and ignorant and doomed to remain so.

What confronts him is in fact "objectified labour", the result of labour in the past. In pre-capitalist society the producer was not confronted with means of production dominating and threatening him as alien power.

"Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer.… what we are confronted by here is the alienation of man from his own labour. To that extent the worker stands on a higher plane than the capitalist from the outset, since the latter has his roots in the process of alienation and finds absolute satisfaction in it. Whereas right from the start the worker is a victim who confronts it as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement".

Box 17.5: Marx's Work Ethic

According to Marx, work should be the expression of man and his creativity. Work should be one which he loves and enjoys doing it. Capitalist mode of production has distorted the meaning and nature of work. Work ceases to be an expression and becomes a yoke under which the labourer groans. The human being (the subject) is treated lower or valued lower than the commodity

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(object) that he himself would contribute to what is called as objectification. In a capitalist society, the wealth generated by the mode of production is appropriated by one class i.e. owners of land and capital. Thus as capitalism progresses, the devaluation of the worker also increases. This leads to objectification, where the worker gets assimilated to the product (object) and consequently loses his own identity. Marx summarizes the alienation of labour in the following words:

First, the fact that, labour is external to the worker i.e. it does not belong to his essential being. That in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when is not working and when is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character merges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual – that is, operates on him as an alien, divine or diabolical activity – in the same way the worker's activity, is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.

Alienation is inevitable in modern society because with the demand for better technology, and rising consumerism, men will continue to be alienated in one form or the other. Increasing division of labour and emergence of specialists make men dependent on the product and it is not likely that this phenomenon of alienation will stagnate and retrogress.

17.5 Conclusion

Alienation is an objective condition inherent in the social and economic arrangement of capitalism. It is impossible to extricate Marx's ideas about alienation from his wider sociological discussion of the division of labour, the evolution of private property relations, and the emergence of conflicting classes. In the Marxian terminology, alienation is an objectively verifiable state of affairs, inherent in the specific social relations of capitalist production. For Marx, the history of mankind is not only a history of class struggle but also of the increasing alienation of man.

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Unit 18
Sovereignty

Contents

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to

□   discuss the rise of sovereign stated

□   legal and political sovereignty

□   explain the difference between internal and external sovereignty

18.1   Introduction

Sovereignty is an important element of the state which distinguishes the state from other political associations within a society and similar entities in the international society. The origin and history of the idea of sovereignty is intimately connected with the origin and development of the territorial states in modern times. It is for this reason that the meaning of sovereignty has undergone change across history. Despite the many meanings of the concept, sovereignty has a core meaning. Hinsley, an eminent Political Scientists, captures the core meaning of sovereignty when he says that it is "the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community...and that no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere".

Sovereignty, then, is an assumption about authority. We might say that sovereignty is the basic assumption about authority of modern political life, domestically and internationally. Authority is the right or title to rule. Sovereignty is the assumption that the government of a state is both supreme and independent. It is supreme over everybody who lives in its territorial jurisdiction and it is independent from other governing authorities.

The concept of sovereignty has been controversial in academic discourse. To a large measure this is because of the contrasting ways in which it is used- to refer to independence and to autonomy. The former is a notion of authority and right, but the second is a notion of power and capability. While historians, international lawyers and political theorists tend to operate with the first concept, political economists, and political sociologists tend to employ the later concept. These two categorically different approaches to sovereignty exist and must be borne in mind as we proceed to analyse the key concept in political thought.

From this starting point, this unit examines the rise of the modern territorial states with which the concept is associated with. Thereafter we will proceed to explain how the concept of sovereignty which was originally associated with the rulers came to be liked with the people or the ruled. We will also examine the two contrasting ways in which the concept has been used in Political Science and International Relations.

18.2 The Rise of Sovereign States

Sovereignty is a constitutional arrangement of political life. It is thus artificial and historical. There is nothing about sovereignty that is natural or inevitable or immutable. In fact, the notion of sovereignty was absent before the modern territorial states came into being in Europe between the 15th and 17th centuries. The idea of sovereignty was not part of the ancient classical Greek world. There the city-states or polis did not differentiate between state and society-ruled as it was by citizen governors. The citizen was both a subject of state authority and also creator of public rules and regulations.

The Roman Empire that eclipsed the Greek city-states established a new type of rule, rule by a single central authority. What pleased the emperor had the force of law. While the idea of sovereignty as a distinct form of law making power was established, it did not outlive the Roman Empire.

The idea of sovereignty was progressively submerged by the rise of Christian faith when the Roman Empire was succeeded by a highly decentralised system of feudal order. During this period, Christianity gradually came to depend on two theocratic authorities, the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. The source of authority and wisdom shifted from this worldly to the other worldly representatives. At the core of the Christian worldview was the belief that the good lay in submission to God's will. Law of nature or religious rules came to be regarded as superior to laws of the state. As Benn and Peters point out "in the feudal world the primary concept was not the state but law- a law not made by politicians but part of a universal and eternal order, to be discovered by a study of custom and precedent. Kings, councils and judges found and formulated it but could not make it; for to create new law would be to impose a new obligation by an act of will, and only God could do that."

Box 18.1: The Modern Age

That medieval order was weakened by two important movements that marked the beginning of the modern age—the Renaissance and the Reformation. While the Renaissance led to the rediscovery of the humanism as well as the principles and precepts of Roman laws and thus led to new ways of thinking about political authority, the Reformation challenged the papal jurisdiction and authority across Europe. The weakening authority of the Church and the Holy Roman Empire was exploited by princes who asserted their authority over feudal lords and established centralised monarchies. In England this was achieved under Tudor dynasty, in France under the Bourbons, in Spain under the Habsburgs and so on. For the first time, secular rulers were able to claim to exercise supreme power, and this they did in a new language of sovereignty.

As the territorial state was occupying the European continent, piece by piece, eventually forming the system that came to occupy the globe, contemporary political philosophers embraced this form of polity and described what made it legitimate. In the early years of the formation of territorial

states in Europe, two contemporary philosophers, Niccolo Machiavelli and Martin Luther, provided legitimacy to the idea of sovereignty of the territorial state. They did not write explicitly or consciously about sovereignty, yet their ideas amounted in substance to important developments in the concept. Observing the politics of city-states in his Renaissance Italy, Machiavelli (1469-1527) described what a Prince had to do to promote a flourishing republic in terms that conferred on him supreme authority within his territory. The Prince, he advised, should not be bound by natural law, canon law, Gospel precepts, or any of the norms or authorities that obligated members of Christendom. The Prince instead should be prepared to 'not to do good' and perform evil, not because evil is no longer evil, but because it was sometimes necessary to further the cause of a strong and well-ordered state. The obligation of the Prince was *raison d'etat*. The Prince was supreme within the states territory and responsible for the well being of this singular, unitary body.

Martin Luther argued for sovereignty from a different perspective. His theology of Reformation sought to strip the Catholic Church of its many powers, not only its ecclesiastical powers, but temporal powers as well. Luther held that under God's authority, there existed two orders with two forms of government. The realm of the spirit was the order in which Christ was related to the soul of the believer. The realm of the world was the order of the secular society where civil authorities ran governmental institutions through law and coercion. Both the realms furthered the good of the believers, though in different senses. Luther argued that these two realms need to be separately organised, with the leaders of the Church performing spiritual duties and the secular rulers, the princes, kings and magistrates would perform temporal ones. Thus, even without discussing the doctrine of sovereignty, Luther and his followers prescribed for princes all of its substance.

18.3   Conceptions of Sovereignty

The earliest scholar to espouse the doctrine of sovereignty explicitly is the French philosopher and thinker, **Jean Bodin** (1529-96). Writing at a time when France was rife with religious and civil conflicts, Bodin, like Machiavelli, asserted that such conflicts could be solved if it was possible to establish the existence of an unrestricted ruling power competent to overrule all religious and customary authority. He then went on to develop this notion into what is regarded as a classic statement of modern theory of sovereignty: that there must be within every political community or state a determinate sovereign authority whose powers are decisive and whose powers are recognised by the community as the rightful basis of authority. In the **Six Books of a Commonwealth** (1576), Bodin presented sovereignty as the untrammelled and undivided power to make laws. Law is accordingly 'nothing else than the command of the sovereign in the exercise of his sovereign power'. The sovereign power 'cannot be subject to the commands of another', for it is the sovereign that 'makes law for the subject'.

Bodin did not, however, advocate or justify despotic rule, but rather claimed that the sovereign monarch was constrained by the existence of a higher law, in the form of will of God or natural law. The sovereignty of temporal rulers was therefore underpinned by divine authority.

Bodin believed that a sovereign authority could only be properly established if, 'body politic was regarded as being composed of both ruler and ruled, integrated as previous beliefs and politics had failed to integrate them' (Hinsley, 86).

Bodin, preoccupied as he was with establishing the necessity of monarchical sovereignty, did not focus on the tensions inherent in idea of a sovereign power comprising both the ruler and the ruled. The three most important members of the social contract school, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau dwelt on this theme but they did not agree on the nature of sovereign power and the criteria of legitimacy of government and state. At the one extreme was Hobbes who provided a classic statement about state sovereignty and at the other end was Rousseau who developed the doctrine of popular sovereignty.

Writing at a time of political instability, the civil war in England, **Thomas Hobbes** (1588-1679), like Bodin, sought to establish the necessity of an all powerful sovereign capable of securing the conditions of 'peaceful and commodious living'. But he went on to establish a unique relation of authority—the relation of sovereign to the subject— and a unique political power by arguing that an all powerful sovereign could be established only when the individuals 'lay down their right to all things'. Hobbes based his sovereignty on a covenant of each member of a community with another member to surrender all their rights and powers into the hands of one person or body (the Leviathan, which represented the abstract notion of the state) who thereby becomes the sovereign. Since the sovereign is not himself a party to the contract it cannot be annulled by those who made it. Moreover, this sovereign had the monopoly and the right to use coercive power because 'men's ambitions, avarice, anger and other passions' are so strong that 'covenants without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all'. The authority of the sovereign is therefore permanent, undivided and ultimately unlimited. Hobbes conception of sovereignty thus provided a strong justification for state power.

If Hobbes had transferred sovereignty to the state and the rulers, **Jean Jacques Rousseau** (1712-78) insisted on retaining sovereignty for the people. In Rousseau's view, sovereignty originates in the people. Citizens can only be obligated to a system of laws and regulations they have prescribed for themselves with the general good in mind. The sovereign authority is the people making the rules by which they live. In this perspective, the ruled should be the rulers: the affairs of the state should be integrated into the affairs of ordinary citizens.

Rousseau did not posit any limits on the decisions of the democratic majority. As Berlin (1969) pointed out the community could easily destroy the liberty of the individuals. Thus, if Hobbes placed the state in an all powerful position with respect to the community, Rousseau placed the community (the majority) in a position to wholly dominate individual citizens.

John Locke (1672-1704) transcended the dualism between the ruler and the ruled, state and community by reaffirming the location of sovereignty in the body politic as a whole. In this conception of sovereignty, the community is the source of sovereignty and the state is the proper instrument for its exercise. In Locke's scheme, the formation of the state does not signal the transfer of all subjects rights the state. The subject transfers the law making and enforcement rights, but the whole process is conditional upon the state adhering to its essential purpose: the preservation of 'life, liberty and estate'. Thus supreme power remains ultimately with the people who retain the right to dispense with the rulers and even with the existing form of government.

Reflection and Action 18.1

Comment upon the ideas of Rousseau and Locke with reference to sovereignty. Write down your commands in a notebook.

The ideas of Rousseau and Locke had a powerful role in replacing dynastic rule with representative governments in Europe and later in other parts of the world. Though the subsequent history of the concept of sovereignty has been marked dispute and complexity, there is a broad consensus that 'sovereignty is the supreme law making and decision making power of a community, that the ultimate source of sovereignty is the people, that sovereignty is necessarily delegated by the people to the state and exercised on their behalf through the government, and that constitutional arrangements are necessary to safeguard these political goods (Held 84, p).

From the description of conceptions of sovereignty it is clear that while there is a consensus on the need for a determinate authority, there are differences on the nature of the supreme authority, whether it refers to legal authority or unchallengeable political power. There are also differences on its location, whether it lies with the state or with the people. In the following sections, we will dwell on these aspects before proceeding to examine external sovereignty or the independent and autonomous status of the sovereign states in international relations.

18.4 Legal and Political Sovereignty

As we saw, Bodin argued for a sovereign who made laws but was not himself bound by those laws. Law, according to Bodin, amounted to little more than the command of the sovereign, and subjects were required simply to obey. Hobbes, on the other hand, described sovereignty in terms of power rather than authority. He defined sovereignty as a monopoly of coercive power and advocated that it be vested the hands of a single person or body of persons. This difference of emphasis on authority and power has led to the development of two distinct notions of sovereignty— legal sovereignty and political sovereignty.

Legal sovereignty is based upon the belief that that ultimate and final authority resides in the laws of the state. This is *de jure* sovereignty, supreme power defined in terms of legal authority. In other words, it is based upon the right to require somebody to comply, as defined by law. By contrast, political sovereignty is not in any way based upon a claim to legal authority but is concerned simply about the actual distribution of power, that is, *de facto* sovereignty. Political sovereignty therefore refers to the existence of a supreme political power, possessed of the ability to command obedience because it monopolises coercive force.

It should be noted that though one can analytically distinguish the two concepts, in practice they are closely related in practice. There are reasons to believe that on their own neither constitutes a viable form of sovereignty.

In a sense sovereignty always involves a claim to exercise legal authority, a claim to exercise power by right and not merely by virtue of force. All substantial claims to sovereignty therefore have a crucial legal dimension. Nevertheless, law on its own does not always secure compliance. There will be always some individuals and groups within a society who will disregard

the laws of the state and commit crime. The state, therefore, has to have the ability to secure compliance. Legal authority has to be underpinned by the exercise of power.

Box 18.2: Political Conception of Sovereignty

All states seek a monopoly of coercive power and prevent or at least limit their citizens' access to it. But very few rule through the use of force alone. Almost all states have sought to persuade citizens that they have the right to rule. Such efforts to acquire legal sovereignty have, in part, contributed to the establishment of constitutional and democratic governments. Some states, such as Nazi Germany and Pol Pot's Cambodia, came very close to establishing an exclusive political form of sovereignty. They ruled largely through their ability to repress, manipulate and coerce. But they did not endure for long. Moreover, even these states have sought to acquire the mantle of legal authority by building up vast ideological apparatus.

Thus sovereignty in practice has meant the presence of both legal and political authority.

a) Characteristics of Sovereignty

Before we proceed to examine the external aspect of sovereignty, it will be useful to list out the characteristics of sovereignty emerging from the conceptions of sovereignty. The key characteristics of sovereignty are explained below:

Absoluteness: The sovereign's authority is absolute and unlimited vis a vis other associations in a society. It is absolute in the sense of not being subject to any restraints, legal or otherwise. Laws and decrees passed by the sovereign are binding on all citizens. Social groups and associations such as the family, village councils, clubs, trade unions, businesses can establish rules which command authority, but only within the limits defined by law. If the sovereign is subject to either internal or external control of some other authority, that body ceases to be a sovereign.

Exclusive: The sovereign power of the state is exclusive, in the sense that no association is in a position to compete with it. There can be only one sovereign authority in a state which can legally command obedience of its inhabitants. Sovereignty does not accept any rival or parallel authority within the boundary of the state.

Permanence: Sovereignty is self-perpetuating. As long as the state exists, it is the supreme form of authority. Despite changes of governments, the sovereignty of the state endures. Once sovereignty is lost, the state ceases to exist.

Universality: The sovereign state exercises authority over all other individuals and groups of individuals within its jurisdiction. No group or person can claim immunity from its jurisdiction, as a matter of legal right.

Inalienability: The sovereignty of the state cannot be alienated. Since sovereignty forms the essential personality of the state, the very act of alienating it from the state would amount to the destruction of the state. As Leiber put it: 'Sovereignty can no more be alienated than a tree can alienate its right to sprout or a man can transfer his life or personality to any other without self-destruction'.

Indivisible: In a state there can be only one sovereign power. If sovereignty is divided, it implies that more than one state exists. Even if the exercise of sovereign power is shared among the branches of governmental machinery, the supreme authority is indivisible, in terms of its pervasive coercive command over other associations in the society. Agencies of government are mere functionaries of the sovereign.

As we noted at the beginning of the unit, the concept of sovereignty has been used in two contrasting ways. In the form of internal sovereignty, it refers to the distribution of authority within a state and leads to questions about the need for supreme power and its location within the political system. In the form of external sovereignty, it is related to the role of the state in the international order and to whether or not it is able to operate as an independent and autonomous actor on the world stage. It should be, however, noted that the two do not describe exclusive sorts of sovereignty, but different aspects of sovereignty that are coexistent and omnipresent. Sovereign authority is exercised within borders, but also, by definition, with respect to outsiders, who accept its independence.

18.5   Internal Sovereignty

The preceding discussion on the concept of sovereignty has been largely in terms of internal sovereignty. As we saw, much of modern political theory has been an attempt to decide precisely where sovereignty should be located. Early political thinkers such as Machiavelli, Bodin and Hobbes were inclined to the belief that sovereignty should be vested in the hands of a single person, a monarch. The overriding merit of vesting sovereignty in a single individual was that sovereignty would then be indivisible; it would be expressed in a single voice that could claim final authority. Locke, Rousseau and the subsequent thinkers departed from this absolutist notion of sovereignty. They rejected monarchical rule in favour of the notion of popular sovereignty, the belief that ultimate authority is vested in the people themselves. This doctrine of popular sovereignty is generally regarded as the basis of modern democratic theory.

While these thinkers disagreed about who or what the ultimate authority should be, they were united in their belief that sovereignty could be and should be located in a determinant body. This is the traditional doctrine of sovereignty which is also called as the monistic theory of sovereignty. Even Rousseau, who espoused popular sovereignty, acknowledged that the 'general will' was indivisible whole which could only be articulated by a single individual, who he called 'the legislator'.

This traditional doctrine of sovereignty has come under growing criticism in an age of pluralistic and democratic government. John Friggs, Harold J Laski and other pluralists have argued that the monistic theory is intrinsically linked to its absolutist past and so is frankly undesirable. They emphasise that political power in any given society does not rest only in the state apparatus, but is shared by a number of groups and institutions other than the state in that society. Moreover, they point out that it is no longer applicable to modern systems of government, which operate according to a network of checks and balances. For a pluralist, liberal-democratic principles are the very antithesis of sovereignty.

While the pluralists caution against the danger of 'elected' or 'majority' and call for restraining and influencing the exercise of the sovereign power of

the state, all the same they seem to miss the point that the monist position is that of legal theory of sovereignty. That is, state alone has compulsory and universal jurisdiction in its territory. It alone legally can use coercive power against those who break its law. This right of the state is recognised by all the citizens. Other associations may use power, but their right may not be accepted by all individuals. They may appeal against their actions to the higher authorities. And the state is the highest authority. There can be no appeal against the sovereign actions of state.

b) Locating Sovereignty

After the English and the French Revolutions in 1688 and 1789 respectively, the representative and constitutional governments that were established initially in the West and later in other parts of the world assumed different forms. The task of locating sovereignty in representative governments is particularly difficult. The English jurist, John Austin, investigating who in the name of the people or of the state exercises sovereignty in Britain, came to the conclusion that it is neither vested in the Crown nor in the people but in the 'Monarch in Parliament'. This was the supreme organ that enacted laws binding on everybody else but that was not itself bound by the laws of and could change these laws at will. However, as we shall see later, this idea of legislative or parliamentary supremacy fitted only a particular system of government that prevailed in Britain in the 19th century.

The idea of legislative supremacy does not fit well in federal states, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and India, where government is divided into two levels, each of which exercises a range of autonomous powers. Federalism is often said to involve a division of power between these two levels, between the centre and the states or constituent units. However, in developing the notion of a shared or divided sovereignty, federalism moves the concept away from the classical belief in a single and indivisible sovereign power. It may, furthermore, be suggested that neither level of government can finally be described as sovereign because sovereignty rests with the document which apportions power to each level: the constitution. But then, since the power to interpret the constitution lies with the Supreme Court one can argue that sovereignty resides with the Supreme Court. However, the Supreme Court cannot properly be portrayed as the supreme constitutional arbiter since its interpretation of the Constitution can be overturned by amendments to the original document. In this sense, sovereignty can be said to reside with the institution empowered to amend the Constitution: in the United States it is two-thirds majorities in both Houses of Congress and three-quarters of America's state legislatures, or in a convention specifically called for the purpose; in India, it is two-third majorities in both the Houses of Parliament and one half of the states. To complicate matters further, it can be argued that sovereignty in India ultimately is vested in the Indian people themselves. This is expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution which opens with the words 'We the people. . .' In view of these complexities, a polycentric concept of sovereignty has taken root in federal states.

It has long been argued that in Britain a single, unchallenge-able legal authority exists in the form of the Westminster Parliament. In the words of John Stuart Mill, 'Parliament can do anything except turn a man into a woman'. Being a unitary form of government, no rival legislatures exist to challenge the authority of Parliament; all legislation derives from a single source. However, it can be argued that in reality the British Parliament enjoys neither legal nor political sovereignty. Its legal sovereignty has been compromised by

membership of the European Union (EU). As an EU member, Britain is obliged to conform to European law and is thus subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg. In fact, the European Court in 1991 declared the Merchant Shipping Act of 1988 passed by the British Parliament to be unlawful because it contravened European laws guaranteeing a free movement of goods and persons within the European Community (as the EU was then). If Parliament can any longer be described as legally sovereign it is only by virtue of the fact that it retains the legal right to withdraw from the EU. In political terms also, the Parliament has never enjoyed sovereignty in the sense of acting as it pleases. Its behaviour has always been constrained by a wide range of institutions, including the electorate, organised interests, particularly those which possess financial or economic muscle, major trading partners, suprana-tional organisations, international treaties and so forth.

Reflection and Action 18.2

Does sovereignty lie in the state or the Political Community? Discuss with other students and friends.

To conclude, sovereignty resides in the state or political community as a whole. Given the complex checks and balances that operate in democratic states and the internal and external constraints that operate on these states, questions relating to the precise location of sovereignty appear to have become outdated. It is the issue of external sovereignty, that is, independence vis a vis other states in the international order that has become absolutely vital. Let us focus on this aspect of sovereignty.

18.6 External Sovereignty

Sovereignty, as seen from inside a state, is supreme authority and as seen from outside, is self-governing authority. In other words, external sovereignty refers to the state's place in the international order and therefore to its sovereign independence in relation to other states.

In international relations, sovereignty has become synonymous with state power. It is useful to conceive of external sovereignty as constitutional independence. The state possesses a constitution, written or unwritten, democratic or otherwise, which makes it independent from other states. State sovereignty, in the sense of constitutional independence, consists of being apart from other similar entities. The moment a state establishes a constitutional link with another state, it loses its sovereignty, for it is contained within a wider scheme. External sovereignty, in other words, implies that there is no higher political authority over the state. The sovereign state has the exclusive jurisdiction over its territory, its occupants, resources and events that take place there.

Box 18.3: Westphalian International Society

Westphalian international society was based on two principles. The first principle was *rex est imperator in regno suo* (the king is emperor in his own realm). This norm specifies that sovereigns are not subjects to any higher political authority. Every king is independent and equal to every other king. The second principle was *cujus region, ejus religio* (the ruler determines the religion of his realm). This norm specifies that outsiders have no right to intervene in a sovereign jurisdiction on religious grounds.

The practice of sovereignty underlying the contemporary state system is generally traced to the Peace of Westphalia, the set of treaties that marked

the end of Thirty Years War in 1648. While this is a gross oversimplification of a complicated process that developed over centuries. However, by the 17th century some of the features of the state system had solidified. In two broad respects, the system of sovereign states triumphed at Westphalia. First, states emerged as virtually the sole form of constitutional authority in Europe. Secondly, it brought to an end intervention in matters of religion, up to then the most commonly practiced abridgement of sovereign prerogatives.

The principle of exclusive jurisdiction over people and resources within its territory has been codified by many agreements and treaties. The Charter of the United Nations, for instance, incorporated the principle of territorial integrity and political independence in Article 2 (4) thus: 'Member shall refrain in their international relations from the treat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.'

External sovereignty also establishes the basic condition of international relations- anarchy, meaning the absence of a higher authority over the states. There is no rule-making and rule-enforcing institution in international relations. Anarchy or the absence of higher political authority above the states does not necessarily imply chaos or absence of order. In fact, although there is no international government, there exists a rule governed social order in international relations. States, initially free of obligation to one another, have accepted a whole body of formal and informal rules (for instance, international law, rules governing diplomacy and recognition of spheres of influence, etc.

Many of the formal and rules accepted by the states restrict their freedom of action in certain activities and spheres. Moreover, because of the uneven distribution of power capabilities of states, the powerful states have greater freedom of action than the weaker states. Some scholars, therefore, talk of the erosion of state sovereignty or it being present only in great powers. But it should be noted sovereignty is not autonomy or freedom of action but constitutional independence. The distinction between autonomy and independence is the distinction between political and legal sovereignty. The states may be losing the ability to do what they want, but not their right to do so. If sovereignty is understood in political terms, one can argue that from the inception of the state system states had not much freedom of action. But if sovereignty is understood to mean the basic organising principles of international relations, that is, an order structured around sovereign states, then nothing much has changed. International commitments that place restrictions on states domestic polices are those that have been voluntarily accepted by states as sovereign entities. In contemporary international relations, the most basic norms, principles and practices continue to rest on state sovereignty.

While the principle of external sovereignty is widely recognised and enshrined as a basic principle of international law, it is not without its critics. There are those who draw our attention to the sinister implications of granting each state exclusive jurisdiction over its own territory, people and resources. Human rights advocacy groups, for instance, provide abundant evidence of state capacity to abuse, terrorise and even exterminate their own population and argue for intervention in states. They insist that states should conform to a higher set of moral principles, usually expressed in the doctrine of human rights. Attempts have been made to embody such principles in international law, notably in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948). (Eloberate?)

Then there are those critics who suggest that the classical argument for sovereignty should go beyond national sovereignty. Thinkers such as Bodin and Hobbes emphasised that sovereignty was the only alternative to disorder, chaos and anarchy. Yet this is precisely what a rigorous application of the principle of national sovereignty would turn international politics into. Just as the absence of an internal sovereign leads to brutality and injustice in interpersonal and intra-societal relations, so does the absence of a supreme international authority leads to illegal interventions by powerful states and disputes and armed conflicts (wars) between states. In this way, the classical doctrine of sovereignty can be turned into an argument for world government

18.7   Conclusion

Sovereignty is a contentious concept in domestic and international relations. As we saw, the concept developed as an instrument for the assertion of royal authority over feudal lords in the construction of modern territorial states. Political thinkers from Machiavelli to Rousseau believed that instabilities and disorder were obstacles to a stable society and could only be overcome by viable governments that could firmly establish sovereignty over territory and population. While political thinkers differed on the location of sovereignty and therefore the form of government, they were united in believing that only a determinate authority had the capacity to maintain order. The concept of sovereignty was then integrated into theories of international relations through a set of ideas that evolved over a period of time, but got established at Westphalia that ended the moral authority of the Church over secular rulers. Though external sovereignty has undergone major changes as a result of the international commitments made by sovereign stats as well as because of growing interdependence of states, the basic international norms, principles and practices continue to rest on state sovereignty that is constitutional independence of states.

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Unit 20
Citizenship

Contents

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you would be able to

▢   define global and dual citizenship

▢   outline the rights and duties as a citizen

▢   describe the nation of civil liberty

20.1   Introduction

Citizenship is one of the most commonly used terms in a democracy. It is used at all levels of politics; in formal legal documents, in laws, in constitutions, in party manifestoes and in speeches. But what is citizenship? Or, who is a citizen? A citizen is not anyone who lives in a nation-state. Among those who live in a nation-state, there are citizens and aliens. A citizen is not just an inhabitant. He or she does not merely live in the territory of a state. A citizen is one who participates in the process of government. In a democratic society, there must be a two-way traffic between the citizens and the government. All governments demand certain duties from the citizens. But, in return, the state must also admit some demands on itself. These are called rights. A citizen must have political rights. A person who is ruled by laws but who has no political rights is not a citizen.

It is not possible to have citizens under all types of governments. Governments, which are not democratic, cannot, strictly speaking, have citizens. They have only rulers and subjects. In governments which are not democratic, people who live in the country often have only obligations towards the state and no rights. The government expects them to perform their duties, to pay taxes, to obey laws, to do whatever else the government wants of them. But they cannot question their rulers or ask them to explain their actions. Politics in these societies is like a one-way traffic. The government tells the people what to do and what not to, but does not

listen to them. Only the rulers have rights. The ruled or the subjects have duties laid down for them by the governors. Such undemocratic governments have been much more common than democratic ones. Feudal states were terribly undemocratic. There have been thoroughly undemocratic states in modern times, too. Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy are examples of the most brutal authoritarian state. So were the most colonial states. Democratic governments are not necessarily associated with the advanced industrial societies of the West. The British were reputed for their democratic system of governance. But they maintained the worst autocratic governments in their colonies. France is a democratic country, but fought a savage colonial war in Algeria. Most colonial states practiced democracy at home but authoritarianism abroad. Industrial societies like Germany and Italy produced most brutal fascist governments during inter war period. Historically, the term citizenship was linked with the rise of democracy. The demand for democratic government came up first in the western societies like England, France, and the United States of America.

Democracy means that everybody should have political rights. When one has political rights, the right to vote, the right to participate in deciding about important questions facing one's society, one is a citizen. Universal suffrage is a recent phenomenon. The ideas of democracy made people fight for their rights. Many of the ideas which democracy is made up were accepted after the great revolutions. For instance, after the revolution France became a republic. All citizens were made equal and had the same rights. The revolutionaries published a declaration of the rights of man. This became a symbol of democratic revolutions in Europe. Initially, very few people had the right to vote, or stand for election. But people fought for the universal adult franchise. Finally, universal adult suffrage was accepted and everybody came to have the right to vote.

The word citizen was made popular by the French Revolution in 1789. Later on, this word was used whenever democratic governments were constituted. At present it is common usage to treat people in democratic societies as citizens. It means, above all, that in relation to his government, the individual is active, not simply passive. He does not only obey and listen to what the government says. The government must also listen to him in turn. He has the right to express his views freely, to be consulted and to be involved in the politics of his country. The citizen does not only enjoy rights. He also has some duties towards his country, society and fellow citizens. A citizen is a person who enjoys rights that the constitution provides; and enjoyment of rights also imposes some duties upon him. A good citizen is one who is conscious of his rights and duties.

One essential thing for a democratic state is that citizens must participate in the governing process. The quality of democracy improves if citizens from all walks of life can participate in its activities and if they take interest in the basic processes of making important decisions for their society. Democracy implies that the decisions affecting the whole society should be taken as far as possible by the whole society. Participation of ordinary citizens makes the government more responsive, and the citizens more responsible. Citizens' participation is the basis of responsible, limited and constitutional government.

> **Box 20.1: Idea of Citizenship**
>
> The idea of citizenship means that not only the government has some claims on the citizen, the citizen too has some claims on the government. A government is an association like many others in society. But it is an association of a special kind, an association that one simply cannot escape or be indifferent about. Democrats rightly feel that since the government control the people, it is good that people must have some kind of control over the government. The best government is one in which the largest number of people participates in making decisions for the whole society. This participation of ordinary people is precisely what is called citizenship. The idea of citizenship is closely linked to participation of people in government. This is how the ideas of democracy and citizenship are linked to each other.

20.2 Historical Perspective

In modern times, three major issues have dominated the world. First, the place of the church and various religions within the nation-state. Second the admission of the lower strata, particularly the workers, to full political and economic 'citizenship' through universal suffrage and the right to bargain collectively. And third, the struggle for the equitable distribution of the national income among the people.

The place of the church in society was fought through and resolved in most of the nations in the 18th and 19th centuries. The citizenship issue has also been resolved in various ways. The United States and Britain gave the workers suffrage in the 19th century. In countries like Sweden, which resisted until the first part of the 20th century, the struggle for citizenship became combined with socialism as a political movement, thereby producing a revolutionary socialism. In other words, where the workers were denied both economic and political rights, their struggle for redistribution of income and status was superimposed on a revolutionary ideology. Where the economic and status struggle developed outside of this context, the ideology with which it was linked tended to be that of gradualist reform. The workers in Prussia, for example, were denied free and equal suffrage until the revolution of 1918 and thereby clung to revolutionary Marxism. In southern Germany, where full citizenship rights were granted in the late 19th century, reformist, democratic, and non-revolutionary socialism was dominant. In France, the workers won the suffrage but were refused basic economic rights until after World War II. The workers have won their fight for full citizenship in the Western nation-states.

Representatives of the lower strata are now part of the governing groups. The basic political issue of the industrial revolution, the incorporation of the workers into the legitimate body politic, has been settled. The key domestic issue today is collective bargaining over differences in the division of the total product within the framework of a welfare state.

In the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa the situation is somewhat different from the Western nation-state. In Western nations the workers were faced with the problem of winning citizenship from the dominant aristocratic and business strata. In Asia and Africa the long-term presence of colonial rulers has identified conservative ideology and the more well to do classes with subservience to colonialism, while leftist ideologies have been

identified with nationalism. The trade unions and workers' parties of Asia and Africa have been a legitimate part of the political process from the beginning of the democratic system.

20.3   Definition

Since antiquity, citizenship has been defined as the legal status of membership in a political community. Under Roman jurisprudence, citizenship came to mean someone free to act by law, free to ask and expect the law's protection. This legal status signified a special attachment between the individual and the political community. In general, it entitled the citizenship to whatever prerogatives and responsibilities that were attached to membership. With the creation of the modern state, citizenship came to signify certain equality with regard to the rights and duties of membership in the community. The modern state began to administer citizenship; it determines who gets citizenship, what the associated benefits are, and what rights and privileges it entails. As a legal status, citizenship has come to imply a unique, reciprocal, and unmediated relationship between the individual and the political community. Citizenship, in short, is nothing less than the right to have rights.

Full participating membership of a territorial state is citizenship. The term implies a universal basis: either all adults or some general category of them, for instance males or property holders, are citizens. It is a predominantly western concept, originating in Greece and Rome, current in small city-states in medieval Europe, then expanding enormously in capitalist societies of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Given a central place by the British sociologist T.H. Marshall in *Citizenship and Social Class*, an analysis of the development of class conflict in modern states, which is a combination of Marxian and Weberian insights. Capitalism increased the pervasiveness of class conflict in modern societies; citizenship in the territorial state represented not its elimination, but its institutionalisation, and the conversion of national into nation-states. In Britain this occurred in three stages. (1) In the 18th century, civil citizenship: equality before the law, personal liberty, freedom of speech, thought and religion, the right to own property and make contracts. (2) In the 19th century, political citizenship: electoral and office-holding rights. (3) In the 20th century, social citizenship: a basic level of economic and social welfare, the welfare state, and full participation in national culture. Subsequent research has supported the general applicability of the model to advanced capitalist nation-states, though with many particular qualifications. Bendix in *Nation-Building and Citizenship* attempted to apply the model to third world countries.

In political and legal theory, citizenship refers to the rights and duties of the member of a nation-state or city. In some historical contexts, a citizen was any member of a city; that is an urban collectivity, which was relatively immune from the demands of a monarch or state. In classical Greece, citizenship was limited to free men, who had a right to participate in political debate because they contributed, often through military service, to the direct support of the city-state. Historians argue that citizenship has thus expanded with democratisation to include a wider definition of the citizen regardless of sex, age, or ethnicity. The concept was revived in the context of the modern state, notably during the French and American Revolutions, and gradually identified more with rights than obligations. In modern times

citizenship refers conventionally to the various organisations which institutionalise these rights in the welfare state.

In sociology, recent theories of citizenship have drawn their inspiration from T.H. Marshall, who defined citizenship as a status, which is enjoyed by a person who is a full member of a community. Citizenship has three components: civil, political, and social. Civil rights are necessary for individual freedoms and are institutionalised in the law courts. Political citizenship guarantees the right to participate in the exercise of political power in the community, either by voting, or by holding political office. Social citizenship is the right to participate in an appropriate standard of living; this right is embodied in the welfare and educational systems of modern societies. The important feature of Marshall's theory was his view that there was a permanent tension or contradiction between the principles of citizenship and the operation of the capitalist market. Capitalism inevitably involves inequalities between social classes, while citizenship involves some redistribution of resources, because of rights, which are shared equally by all.

Marshall's theory has given rise to many disputes. Critics argue that it is a description of the English experience only, and it is not a comparative analysis of citizenship. It has an evolutionary and teleological view of the inevitable expansion of citizenship, and does not examine social processes, which undermine citizenship. It does not address gender differences in the experience of citizenship. It fails to address other types of citizenship, such as economic citizenship; and it is not clear about the causes of the expansion of citizenship. Some sociologists believe that Marshall's argument can be rescued from these criticisms if the original theory is modified.

There are very different traditions of citizenship in different societies. Active citizenship, which is based on the achievement of rights through social struggle, is very different from passive citizenship, which is handed down from above by the state. There are also very different theoretical approaches to understanding the structure of the public and private realm in conceptions of citizenship. For some sociologists, such as Talcott Parsons, the growth of citizenship is a measure of the modernisation of society because it is based on values of universalism and achievement. These different theoretical traditions are primarily the product of two opposite views of citizenship. It is either viewed as an aspect of bourgeois liberalism, in which case it involves a conservative view of social participation, or it is treated as a feature of radical democratic politics. It is either dismissed as a mere reform of capitalism, or it is regarded as a fundamental plank of democracy. Recently, sociologists have gone beyond these traditional theories of democracy, liberalism, and civil society, to ask questions about the changing relationships between individuals, communities, and states, in a world in which the nation-state is increasingly subject to influences from supranational institutions. Will globalisation replace state citizenship with a truly universal conception of human rights?

20.4   Global Citizenship

Citizenship is an obsolete concept since its cause, the nation state, itself has become obsolete. In a globalised world where technology and trade are creating transnational communities, global citizenship is the beginning of a process that will obliterate boxed identities defined by blood and soil. This

will not just expand our consciousness as citizens of the world but also help us tide over tensions that have been the product of ethnic and national histories. Nation states have the tendency to influence the course of history by imposing on it feuds and rivalries from the past. These impulses of history have been responsible for large-scale bloodshed. The holocaust was a result of the Nazi quest for a racially pure national identity. Similar state-sponsored mass murders have occurred in the Balkans and Africa in the twentieth century. The long standing wars and border disputes all over the world— Palestine, Kashmir, Rwanda, Chechnya— are all a result of our inability to traverse the faultlines of regionalism, religion and ethnicity. Citizenship has been the passport to partake in this dance macabre of violence. It does not offer one the choice of identity but imposes an identity that brings with it a history of prejudice and violence. Any measure that attempts to dilute the influence of a narrow, national identity is welcome.

Box 20.2: The Information Age

Marshall McLuhan predicted the global village in the 1960s. That is now a reality. As sociologists like Manuel Castells argue, we are in the information age. Aided by the flow of people and capital, new social networks are emerging. These seek to imagine a world without borders. Such a world is obviously too cosmopolitan to entertain constricted visions of nationalism. What is needed today is the option to explore multiple identities without creating a hierarchy of them. Global citizenship endorses this view. It allows people to be stakeholders in the future of more than one country and culture. It takes us closer to the Upanishadic vision of vasudaiva kutumbakam (entire world is a one family).

20.5   Dual Citizenship

Assimilation of a migrant community into their adoptive society is not about giving up your own ethnic or cultural identity. Assimilation is all about making your host country more comfortable with you, and you with it, to the mutual benefit of both. The concept of dual citizenship is an anachronism in today's globalised world. It is contrary to the process of assimilation of the migrant community into the host society. Those aspiring for it show a parochial mindset. Such a mindset stands in the way of merging with the mainstream and results in social and cultural ghettoisation. More importantly, it is something that is likely to be resented by the locals of the adoptive country and could lead to a backlash.

Dual citizenship is also likely to cause heartburn among the local residents, who might feel that the migrants are being rewarded for having deserted the homeland for greener pastures. In the context of India, the dual citizenship gives the emigrant Indian the unfair advantage of having his cake and eating it too. Indians who migrate should accept all that goes with migration. Especially those who left India after independence and who are the main beneficiaries of the dual citizenship scheme of the Government of India. Unlike indentured labourers, they were not forced to migrate. They were well-educated, well-off professionals who chose to go elsewhere because it was more comfortable and lucrative. Why then should they continue to seek a foothold in their country of origin? If it is the business in which they are interested in, then why can not they trade and invest like other foreigners? The truth is, dual citizenship is all about material benefit and convenience. It confers the right and ability to Non-resident Indians to travel, study, work,

and buy property anywhere in India. There is no emotional attachment to homeland in it.

20.6 State and the Citizen

The state is an important political organisation that exists within society. However, it is not the only social organisation. There are many other organisations which exist in society, e.g., family, religious, cultural economic and other organisations. All these organisations are established for the achievement of some consciously defined objectives and thus limited purposes. So, the purposes for which the state stands are not all the purposes which man seeks in society. All the organisations pursue their goals in different ways. The state pursues its objectives mainly through law and the coercive force behind it. But that is only one of the ways in which men strive to achieve their desired ends. There is no doubt, however, that the state plays a exceedingly important and increasingly decisive role in the lives of the individuals.

One of the reasons for its pervasive impact is its universality. All the people in a territorial society come under the jurisdiction of the state. In their relationship with the state, they are known as citizens. Another reason for the predominant role of the state in the lives of the citizens is the expanding scope of its activities. Still another reason is the use of coercive force, which only the state can employ in the pursuit of its objectives. The police and defence forces are coercive structures of the state. Another is bureaucracy, a well organised army of government officials who in their dealings with citizens, stand as organs of authority.

Because of its universality, the state's dealings with the citizens become peculiarly impersonal; as expressed in the bureaucracy. Since the state includes all men, its prescriptions apply to all men without the many actual distinctions of value-systems and separate interests. The same law applies to all. So, whatever policies a government may pursue, there would be many citizens and groups of citizens who would be opposed to the existing laws and policies because they believe that a particular law or a particular policy does not serve their interests but those of others.

Sometimes a law may compel a person to do what his conscience forbids him to do and vice versa. And because the law is enforced by coercive power, the citizen may carry the impression that the state or government is an external force denying them the freedom and liberty which they value. There may be issues of morality, private sentiments, high social values or interests of mankind as a whole coming in conflict with the prescriptions of the state. When the state extends its sphere of activity to hitherto excluded areas of social life, this may be regarded as an expropriating attempt by the state and, therefore, resented and opposed. Thus the issues of relationship between the state and the citizen have been matters of genuine concern and endless controversy.

Reflection and Action 20.1

Distinguish between State and Citizens. In what way is each the reflection of the other?

20.7 Nation-State and the Citizenship

Of late, assertion of ethno-religious identities has emerged as a dominant global reality. This has, in turn, questioned the basic premises of the nation-state, which was conceived as the most authentic expression of group life and all encompassing political community. The strong faith reposed in the idea of nation-state and citizenship as means of striking equality, protecting liberty and promoting fraternity among the people of diverse social-economic groups stands shattered. The neutrality of the state and disjunction between ethnicity and state is under question. The basic assumptions of the hyphenated concept of nation-state are contested by the emergent global reality of ethno-national movements, assertion of minorities for their identity and rights, and a strong politics of identity and politics of representation. Now minority and disadvantaged groups are demanding their space in the structure of governance. Autonomy and self-governing rights are major agenda of the new social movement across the world. This has resulted into compounding ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world.

Nation-state is Euro-centric construct, and in many situations and conditions state has been conflated with nation in their conceptualisation. The conflation of state and nation has given rise to many wrong policies of the state towards its ethnic groups and minorities. The occurrences of ethnic violence are not unconnected with the approach of the state towards different ethnic groups. This is not confined only to the case of the developing world which have attempted to emulate the model of the West for building their own structure of state and society but also in the developed world of the West which have been regarded as the citadels of the idea of nation-state. The politics of identity and ethnicity has emerged very forceful. The concept of nation and state has been the part of the grand narratives of modernity. Consequently, the project of nation and state building in third world countries has not been congruent with the European experience, for the societies in these countries have been traditional and diverse. Multiple allegiances have not been co-terminus with the loyalties to the nation-state of the western construct.

Language and territory are main basis of nation formation. There are strong tendencies to conflate state to nation and state building as the nation building. This conflation has given rise to multiple and compounded problem of programmes and policies of the state towards the ethnic groups. Religion cannot provide authentic basis of nation formation and national identity. Therefore, any effort to espouse nationalism by invoking religious exclusivity is not only alienating but also exclusionary. Any such effort in the past has not succeeded and it is bound to fail in the future also.

20.8 Rights and Duties of the Citizenship

Harold J. Laski asserts that every state is known by the rights that it maintains. The state is not merely a sovereign organisation which is entitled to the citizen's allegiance and which has the power to get its will obeyed. The citizen owes, and normally renders allegiance to the state and carries out its commands. However, the citizen does not render allegiance and obedience to the state merely for their own sake. On the contrary, he does so because of his conviction that the state exists and functions for the achievement of common welfare, which includes his own welfare. The citizen has his obligations to the state. At the same time, the state has an obligation

towards citizen, namely, the obligation to provide and maintain those conditions and opportunities, which facilitate the fullest development of his physical, mental and moral faculties. The citizen is entitled to these conditions and opportunities. In other words, they are his rights.

Rights are closely related to duties. Rights imply duties. Rights and duties are two aspects of the same coin. Rights represent a man's 'claims' on society while duties indicate what he owes to society so as to be able to enjoy his rights. Thus, while society guarantees security and well being to the citizen, the citizen owes to society the duty to make his contribution to the security and well being of the community as a whole. In other words, the citizen owes to society as much as he claims from it. His rights are not independent of society. He cannot act unsocially.

There is a twofold relationship between rights and duties. In the first place, every right implies a corresponding duty. A right belonging to one individual imposes on others the duty to respect his right. His right, therefore, is their duty. In the second place, a right is not only a means to the individual's self-development, it is also a means to the promotion of general welfare. Every right of a citizen is accompanied by the duty that he should use it for the common good. Rights, valuable and indispensable as they are, are not absolute or unlimited. Rights and duties are correlative. As a citizen, man owes some obligations and duties to his fellow citizens and to society is universally recognised. As in the case of rights, the obligations of citizenship are also equally applicable to all alike.

20.9   Civil Society

The term 'civil society' was used by writers such as Locke and Rousseau to describe civil government as differentiated from natural society or the state of nature. The Marxist concept derives from Hegel. In Hegel, civil or bourgeois society, as the realm of individuals who have left the unity of the family to enter into economic competition, is contrasted with the state, or political society. For Hegel it is only through the state that the universal interest can prevail, since he disagrees with Locke, Rousseau or Adam Smith that there is any innate rationality in civil society, which will lead to the general good. Marx uses the concept of civil society in his critique of Hegel. Marx uses civil society in his early writing as a yardstick of the change from feudal to bourgeois society. Civil society arose, Marx insists, from the destruction of medieval society. Previously individuals were part of many different societies, such as guilds or estates each of which had a political role, so that there was no separate civil realm. As these partial societies broke down, civil society arose in which the individual became all-important. The old bonds of privilege were replaced by the selfish needs of atomistic individuals separated from each other and from the community. The only links between them are provided by the law, which is not the product of their will and does not conform to their nature but dominates human relationships because of the threat of punishment. The fragmented, conflictual nature of civil society with its property relations necessitates a type of politics, which does not reflect this conflict but is abstracted and removed from it. The modern state is made necessary and at the same time limited by the characteristics of civil society. The fragmentation and misery of civil society escape the control of the state, which is limited to formal, negative activities and is rendered impotent by the conflict, which is the essence of economic life. The political identity of individuals as citizens in modern society is severed from their

civil identity and from their function in the productive sphere as tradesman, day-labourer, or landowner.

Box 20.3: Ideal of the State

In Marx's analysis two divisions grow up simultaneously, between individuals enclosed in their privacy, and between the public and private domains, or between state and society. Marx contrasts the idealism of universal interests as represented by the modern state and the abstractness of the concept of a citizen who is moral because he goes beyond his narrow interest, with the materialism of real, sensuous man in civil society. The irony according to Marx is that in modern society the most universal, moral, social purposes as embodied in the ideal of the state are at the service of human beings in a partial, depraved state of individual egotistical desires, of economic necessity. It is in this sense that the essence of the modern state is to be found in the characteristics of civil society, in economic relations. For the conflict of civil society to be truly superseded and for the full potential of human beings to be realised, both civil society and its product, political society, must be abolished, necessitating a social as well as a political revolution to liberate mankind.

Although Gramsci continues to use the term to refer to the private or non-state sphere, including the economy, his picture of civil society is very different from that of Marx. It is not simply a sphere of individual needs but of organisations, and has the potential of rational self-regulation and freedom. Gramsci insists on its complex organisation, as the 'ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private' where 'hegemony' and 'spontaneous consent' are organised. He argues that any distinction between civil society and the state is only methodological, since even a policy of non-intervention like laissez-faire is established by the state itself. The metaphors he uses to describe the precise relationship between the state and civil society vary. A fully developed civil society is presented as a trench system able to resist the incursions of economic crises and to protect the state. Whereas Marx insists on the separation between the state and civil society, Gramsci emphasises the inter-relationship between the two. The state narrowly conceived as government is protected by hegemony organised in civil society while the coercive state apparatus fortifies the hegemony of the dominant class. Yet the state also has an ethical function as it tries to educate public opinion and to influence the economic sphere. In turn, the very concept of law must be extended, Gramsci suggests, since elements of custom and habit can exert a collective pressure to conform in civil society without coercion or sanctions.

In any actual society the lines of demarcation between civil society and the state may be blurred, but Gramsci argues against any attempt to equate or identify the two. And while he accepts a role for the state in developing civil society, he warns against perpetuating statolatry or state worship. Gramsci redefines the withering away of the state in terms of a full development of the self-regulating attributes of civil society. In Marx's writings civil society is portrayed as the terrain of individual egotism. Gramsci refers to Hegel's discussion of the estates and corporations as organising elements, which represent corporate interests in a collective way in civil society, and the role of the bureaucracy and the legal system in regulating civil society and connecting it to the state.

A reading of the concept of civil society in both Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers leads to an examination of the concept of politics itself. It involves the relationship between individuals, and between individuals and the community, a view of society as organised or not, the delineation of public and private.

> **Reflection and Action 20.2**
>
> Distinguish between multiculturalism and pluralism in social culture.

20.10 Multiculturalism and the Citizenship

The problem of multicultural accommodation is high on the global political agenda. Accommodation refers to a wide range of state measures designed to facilitate identity groups' practices and norms. Due to the anti-ancient regime legacy of standard conceptions of citizenship, individual rights generally are prioritized over assertions of legal entitlements based on sub-national group affiliation. Thus liberal, civic-republican, and ethno-cultural models of membership all share in common a basic mistrust of 'identity groups' as a relevant component of citizenship theory. The term 'identity groups' here refers to a range of cultural, religious, or ethnic groups that are recognisable by virtue of their nomos. 'Identity groups' are distinguishable by a unique history and collective memory; a distinct culture or set of social norms, customs, and traditions; or perhaps an experience of maltreatment by mainstream society.

Proponents of a multicultural understanding of citizenship are concerned with the power of the state and dominant social groups to erode identity groups. This concern derives from a philosophical position that stresses the role of culture in constituting a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. Charles Taylor in his famous essay *The Politics of Recognition,* argues that we form our identities and our conceptions of ourselves as free and equal agents through a dialogical process, using certain given cultural scripts. Culture, under this view, is not just something that we use to understand and evaluate the world; it also is a fundamental part of us.

Membership in an identity group combined with active participation in its cultural expressions as distinct from mere blood ties can provide individuals with an intelligible context of choice and a secure sense of identity and belonging. This emphasis on the links among culture, identity, and group membership stands at the core of the quest for a new multicultural understanding of citizenship. Under this new understanding, persons stand forth with their differences acknowledged and respected, and they participate in the public sphere without shedding their distinct identities. This approach departs from blindness to difference ideal and aims to carve out a philosophical and legal rationale for recognising identity groups as deserving of special or differentiated rights. The multicultural understanding of citizenship therefore departs from the perception of all citizens as individuals who are merely members of a larger political community. Instead it views them as having equal rights as individuals while simultaneously meriting differentiated rights as members of identity groups. Hence in legal terms, the move toward a multicultural citizenship model raises potential conflicts among three components: the identity group, the state, and the individual.

20.11 Conclusion

In this unit, we have discussed the various aspect of citizenship. The concept of citizenship has been defined in the legal and historical perspectives. Its evolution has been delineated from Greek city-states to modern nation-state. Earlier it was a rare privilege of few, now it is the legal political rights of every human being residing in a territory called state. Citizenship refers to the relationship between individuals and the state. Citizenship confers certain legal and political rights and it is the duty of state to enforce and protect these rights. Not only states, citizens also have certain duties towards their fellow being, society, and the state. The concept of citizenship is closely linked to the concept of democracy. In non-democratic societies we have subjects but no citizens. Citizenship means active participation of the people in the decision-making, and the process of governance.

With the emergence of globalisation, the concept of nation-state has become obsolete and with it the concept of citizenship has also lost its sheen. Now, in place of state citizenship, there is talk of global citizenship. Upnishidic vision of vasudhaiv kutumbkam is on the verge of realisation. There is also greater demand for dual citizenship in view of large-scale migration of population from one country to another. India has recently granted dual citizenship to people of Indian origin living in some countries.

Modern society has been described civil or bourgeois society by Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers. Civil society refers to the realm of private sphere of an individual. The economic competition and the independence of the individual characterise civil society. Unity of the family and other medieval associations is absent in the civil society. Civil society has emerged from the destruction of medieval society. For non-Marxist thinkers, it is a rational system, which ensures the social welfare. Marxist thinkers, however, don't agree with this thesis.

Contemporary society is a multicultural society characterised by the diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. Multiculturalism aims at accommodating diverse identity groups into a homogeneous society, without eroding their distinct identity. Multiculturalism promotes unity in diversity and is opposed to assimilation of distinct identity groups. There exists a links among culture, identity, and group membership. This is at the core of the quest for a new multicultural understanding of citizenship.

20.12 Further Reading

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