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Modern Sociological Thinkers-I

MA SOCIOLOGY
3rd Semester

Rajiv Gandhi University
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MA (Sociology)

THIRD SEMESTER

MASOC 501

MODERN SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS

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SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

MODERN SOCIOLOGICAL THINKER

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
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Unit II: Structural-Functionalism T Parsons-System Theory, R.K. Merton-Critique and Reformation of Functional Analysis.	Unit II: Structural Functionalism
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Unit IV: Structuralism and Post-Structuralism Human Nature and Cultural Diversity: C. Levi-Strauss-	Unit IV: Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

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INTRODUCTION

Sociological theories and concepts are the very substance of sociology. There would be no sociology unless there were concepts embedded in sociological theory itself. The basic idea of this book is to acquaint the learner with the major sociological theories learnt through an understanding and application of sociological concepts. The understanding of sociological concepts demands thorough understanding of the basic concepts embedded in theory. As such the learner must attempt to see how these concepts and theory advance the understanding of society at large.

The book is divided into following five units:

Unit I: The Crisis of Sociology and Critique of Positivism

Unit II: Structural-Functionalism

Unit III: Conflict Theory

Unit IV: Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

The learning material in the book is presented in a structural format so that it is easy to grasp. Each unit begins with an introduction followed with unit objectives. The detailed content is then presented in a simple language, interspersed with check your progress questions to enable the student to test his/her understanding as and when they go through each unit. Summary and key terms are provided at the end of each unit which help in quick recollection. Questions and Exercises are also provided for further practice.

UNIT-1

THE CRISIS OF SOCIOLOGY AND THE CRITIQUE OF POSITIVISM

Structure

1.0. Introduction: Challenging the Establishment and Orthodoxy-Gouldner and Mills

1.1. Unit Objectives

1.2. A Biographical sketch of Gouldner

1.3. The coming crisis of Western Sociology

1.4. Power, Prejudice and Sociological Imagination

1.5. Summary

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1.7. Questions: (Short answer types)

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1.0. INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGING THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ORTHODOXY-GOULDNER AND MILLS

The study of sociology of social thought has of late has generated a great interest especially among scholars in recent times. This has a lot to do with to get a fresh insight into the writing of founding fathers for an understanding of current issues. The second one is for young students of sociology who are keen to know the history of the discipline. In between the readings of classical and modern sociology lies the writing of two important American sociologists who took positivism and capitalism by the scruff of its neck and began a realignment of sociological scholarship. Both of them were considered too radical for their time and were often accused of anarchism not because of their intellectual curiosity and contribution but the way they to the establishment, critiquing and attacking its foundation. One identified the crisis in sociological theory while the other provided a sociological insight to look into social context of everyday life. These two celebrated contemporary thinkers were Alan W. Gouldner and C. Wright Mills.

A look into their life and work would be a fascinating study. It will also be an entertaining journey to the mid-twentieth century sociological tradition and the times of socialist challenge to capitalism. The history of social thought in general and in American sociology in particular is the story of these two fascinating sociologists, their life, work and influence on sociological theory. In this instructional material an attempt has been made to capture this phenomenon and provide students an insight into critical sociology.

In fact, the objective of this unit is to familiarize students with critical and reflexive sociology and acquaint them with new sociological tradition. An attempt has been made to address the main concerns of sociological theory in 1960s and depict these concerns through the writings of Gouldner and Mills. The shift from the grand Parsonian narrative of synthesis and integration to a more specific focus on social theory, current problems and preoccupation

with power marks the beginning of reflexive sociology. After a careful reading of this text the students will be able to appreciate the power of critical thinking and will be in a position to locate the Sociology in everyday life.

1.1 . UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Trace the crisis of Western sociology
- Explain the concept of ‘sociological imagination’
- Describe the contribution of Mills to the elite theory
- Examine the link between history and biography from Mill’s perspective

1.2. A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GOULDNER

Born at Harlem, New York on 29th July, 1920 Alvin Ward Gouldner was educated at Bernard College which was then a feeder to Colombia University from where he received his doctoral degree. From an early stage of his career he received recognition due to his brilliant understanding of his subject and published in prestigious American Review of Sociology. He began his teaching career at Antioch College (1952–1954) where he taught sociology and got his professorial break as a professor of sociology at University at Buffalo (1947-1952). He has also Max Weber Professor of Sociology at Washington University and as well as professor of sociology at the University of Amsterdam. He was the president of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

Alvin W. Gouldner’s (1920–80) work can be divided into two halves namely: pre and anti-establishment. In the beginning of his career shaped under the guidance of Robert Merton was more in consonance with the existing theoretical foundation i.e. functionalism of Parsons though glimpse of criticism could be found. It was a time of recognition and consolidation of sociology as a mainline subject in American Universities and increasing emphasis on scientific analysis of social facts. Using his management background and an

ethnographic training Gouldner wrote his first work on nature of bureaucratic structure in an industrial setting based on a study of a mine. This work bears the influence of Max Weber and Talcott Parson and interestingly remained entwined with his entire intellectual life. He was Weberian at heart and a critic of Parsons throughout his life.

The industrialization of American society and its growing shift towards capitalism provided Gouldner with a critical insight to the nature of American society and its intellectual setting. It was at the same vein it was an exciting time for sociologist and social inquiry as well as an era of growing disenchantment. The technological progress that emphasized on technorationality and battle for a humanistic ideology opened a dialectical analytical framework, thereby pushing Gouldner towards Marxism. Accordingly, “in the first half, Gouldner was a functionalist and dutifully contributed insights and theoretical innovations to the paradigm, even while remaining critical of Talcott Parsons' own version of structural functionalism”.

In the early 60s Gouldner changed the track and break away from the dominant tradition of functionalism and structured established position towards an anti-establishment protagonist. As an outspoken critique of establishment sociology who was often derided as an outlaw was sympathetic alternative theories especially Marxism. But Gouldner soon lost faith in Marxism and its emancipatory project. He found both functionalism and Marxism have failed in addressing the requirements of the new age and a solution to contemporary social problems as they lost both the creativity and reflexivity. This in turn has resulted in young generation rejecting them as mere intellectual pursuit rather than a means to an end. This positioning further alienated Gouldner from both traditions of sociology. Concomitantly, it left Gouldner battling on personal and professional fronts in his role as a social critic. As a result he became increasingly hostile toward his fellow colleagues for their willing compliance with prevailing cultural prescriptions and sociological orthodoxy, which he believed were robbing human beings of their agency, vitality, and will to power. Gouldner

firmly believed that a lack of authentic knowledge of self, would not put one in the pedestal of creating social theories with the possibilities of liberating of human spirit from the dungeons of taken for granted world.

An analysis of Gouldner's early work i.e. Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy (1954) shows that though he adopted critical attitude towards the dominant functionalist perspective he was not thoroughly antiestablishment or wanted annihilation of functionalism as a social theory. Rather he followed the dictum of Merton to develop a critical insight to received wisdom and theoretical perspectives irrespective of the status or brilliance of its exemplar. An insight to this trend may be affirmed in his treatment of Max Weber who remains a source of intellectual inspiration to him throughout his life. In 'Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Value-Free Sociology', published in 1964, Gouldner questioned the traditional belief that Weber was committed to a value free sociology, as according to Weber as interpreted by Gouldner, Sociology was incapable of bringing a controversial interpretation of Max Weber's work, arguing that Weber did not believe sociology was capable of simple objectivity.

Despite the strident criticism of functionalism Gouldner at least in his early career was not in favour of abandoning or eradicating functionalism as a theoretical model but he was according to favorable interpretation of his work aiming to rid it from its weakness viz. an unbridled emphasis on conservatism and obsession with value consensus as his aim, at least initially, was not to cripple or eradicate functionalism, but to rehabilitate it by overcoming the weaknesses of the establishment version of functionalism, especially with regard to its tendency toward illegitimate teleology and the conservative implications of its obsession with the value consensus as the basis of social order as espoused by Talcott Parsons.

Further, a sympathetic reading of Gouldner's criticism of Parsons would underline the fact that functionalism's silence on the possibilities of asymmetric distribution of power and

the possibility of use of coercion as a means to establish social order as we find in case of implementation and enforcement of law as means to an alternative theory. Gouldner perceived that such an understanding of differentials dimensions of social structure would have been reflexive on nature and could have the potential a critical theory out of the debris of functionalism. According to Gouldner the concept of reciprocity integral to functionalist theory deals with both the concept of ‘survival’ and ‘exploitation’. But the problem is that it has only held to survival without looking into the aspects of exploitation. If view in context and interpolated with social reality it would have led to two diverse theoretical traditions towards a surprising convergence. Much later, this idea of a convergence between functionalism and Marxism became one of the key features of Gouldner’s argument in Coming Crisis in Western Sociology.

1.3. THE COMING CRISIS OF WESTERN SOCIOLOGY

European sociological tradition was the single most influential intellectual background to the sociology of Gouldner. Influenced especially by the ideas of Plato, the thought and ideas of Gouldner continued to indicate a more philosophical and analytical moorings distinguishing it from the fellow American sociological tradition. His most influential work i.e. **The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology** offers a varied, in-depth argument reflexive sociology which had remained a passion and a lifelong preoccupation for Gouldner. Contesting the dominant paradigm of his time that natural science in general and by its imitation sociology in particular is vitiated with the project of producing objective truths, Gouldner posited that knowledge is not independent of the knower, and that sociology is deeply influenced by socio-political context of its setting. Hence it is important to be conscious of this connection and the role of sociology in our making including our perception of self in future. This book was a critique of all major theoretical tradition of sociology and especially of Parsonian version of structural -functionalism.

The success of Coming Crisis of Western Sociology did not percolate down to his other later works viz. Towards a Reflective Sociology but Gouldner continued to direct his vision towards serious inward-looking critical perspective. He steadfastly posited himself as antiestablishment and advocated for a concerted attempt if not the creation of a theoretical framework based on the critique of modern culture and its techno-rational domination. He voted for an enlightened intellectual class who will constantly engage itself with the intellectual pursuit of cultural criticism. Drawing a boundary between the thinkers who are concerned with the ideal of searching the objective truth that will change history and society vis-à-vis the group who is concerned with the understanding of history in order to change it, Gouldner lent his support to the later. In this context, he argued that ideology should not be taken simply as falsehood used in the interests of a dominant group, although this is often the case: it is developed by intellectuals but has a wider reach and depth and can also become a means of social transformation.

Gouldner in ‘Coming Crisis of Western Sociology’ has delved into the dogma of positivism and increasing influence of data in social science research which he felt has uprooted the moorings of sociology. For him, social sciences in general and sociology in particular must locate itself in the domain of human thought and practice with its limitations and dynamics rather than searching for universally applicable objective criteria. In contrast to Weber’s value free sociology Gouldner as an advocate for value has laden sociology, focusing on human experience and empathy.

He argued that the existing sociological theories have not been able to attract young primarily because they developed in a different era with different social realities. Consequently, they have been unable to address the concerns of the youth hence have lost their connection. According to Gouldner old theories were rooted in a different sentiments and current generation have another type of sentiment. Between these two diametrically

different worldviews the chasm is huge and no apparent attempt has been made to bridge the gap. As a result, the young generation not only thinks that these old theories have not any merit rather they are irrelevant. They abhor the old and embrace the new. For them old theories and people are never to be relied or believed. Their disconnect with old theories is complete when they assert that these theories are simple not rooted in their experience and hence have no plausible understanding of their trials, tribulations and triumph.

One of the theories that have received Gouldner's stringent criticism is positivism and its excessive emphasis on scientific method. Positivism has reduced sociological theorization into collection of data, use of statistical techniques and their explanation through jargons. This according to Goulnader is not only mundane but has perilously failed in taking cognizance human values and their importance in real life. Calling this as a crisis that has afflicted western sociology he draws attention to interdisciplinary research and more focus on contemporary problems. This will lead a reflexive sociology displacing the current focus on empirical investigation and data analysis. He deplored the objective detachment of what he termed "establishment" sociological views, which he regarded as an evasion of moral responsibility and obsequious adherence to the status quo. He believed that sociologists should emphasize contemporary issues such as racial and urban problems and seek to correct social injustice.

The focus on more dynamic and interpretative discourse will lead to development of new theories which will contextualize current accounts of social change and social development. This will help the young to find their space in the vicissitudes of time of which they are a part. They will relate to fast paced life with its enthralling possibilities and equally difficult challenges. Such an attempt written with linguistic lucidity and theoretical sophistication will herald a new era in social theory. The kind of sociological theoretical proposition with a focus on a syncretism tradition of explanations for social change will

certainly be interesting to a wide audience besides ensuring the presence of sociology in the public eye. This explains the appreciation of public to contemporary sociological thinks viz. Bauman or Beck, but despite the claims of difference and dynamism such theories have their origin in Spencer and Hobhouse, and therefore, are subject to same criticisms. These kinds of teleological and tautological explanation of nuances of society though could appeal to the cognitive domain but falls short in empirical verification. However, for all the claims to novelty, this kind of sociology is really just a revival of the kind of sociology that existed in the first half of the twentieth century under the leadership of Spencer, Geddes, Branford and Hobhouse. It is a kind of sociology which does not seek to define its expertise in terms of its empirical research skills, but in terms of its ability to provide an overview of a kind that is not intended to be ‘tested’ by empirical research.

Writing the same narrative Gouldner underlines that the criticism and transformation can be divorced only at our peril from the criticism and transformation of theories about society. Yet the gap between theory and practice, rather common in the annals of American radical movements, is in some quarter is getting bigger. Needless to add, the Left and the radicals have avoided at least temporarily an engagement with social theory. This has partly due to a general disengagement of young generations of Americans with the critical reflection on human thought and partly due to the affinity of some young radicals with ‘hippie’ culture that rejects an alignment with what they called ‘sterile’ intellectual discourse and have more favorably disposed towards aesthetics and mysticism.

In a cryptic response to the Marxism as an alternative ideology in American Sociology Goldner stated that there is nothing creative and original that have been added over last thirty years. The followers of Marxism have only tried to apply the doctrine without deepening it with new interpretations to explain contemporary challenges. This has reduced Marxism as a mere appendage of material interpretation of history rather an evolving critical

tradition. Needless, to add such an obscure idealism reemphasizing rote Marxism have no attraction for young generation of radicals. Further alienating them from not only from interpretative capabilities of a robust sociological tradition but declined their interest in theory itself.

1.4. POWER, PREJUDICE AND SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

One of the prominent thinkers of his time and a contemporary of Gouldner was American sociologist C. Wright Mills. Mills was born at Texas on 28th August 1916 to relatively rich parents and had an early death at the age of 46 on March 20, 1962, in New York. One of key contributions of Mills had been to introduce and popularize Max Weber to the American audience rather authentically along with Hans H. Gerth. His interest in sociology of knowledge led to apply Karl Mannheim's theories on the intellectuals, their political thought and behaviour. A combination of Weber, Mannheim with Marx's dialectical materialism made a potent methodological application of sociological theories on the political and intellectual life of American society.

After completing his graduation and masters from University of Texas, Mills enrolled and received his doctoral degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1941. With his brilliant academic career and a growing reputation, it was a foregone conclusion when he joined the sociology faculty at Columbia University in 1946. Along with Gouldner, Mills is considered a sort of anarchist in American sociology for his anti-establishment and radical ideas. Mills believed and actively pursued an academic agenda that promoted the idea that social scientists should not merely be dispassionate observers and passive intellectual engaged in research and theory but assert their social responsibility. He was appalled with the attitude and moral concerns of his colleagues accusing them of surrendering their ethical considerations and shunning their responsibilities towards society to assume political power and academic positions. This moral turpitude which has resulted in organized academic mafia

that put unqualified people and manipulators in academia in lieu of assuming of positions of leadership was a bugbear for Mills.

The influence of Max Weber in writings of Mills' is unmistakable and he drew heavily from him especially his essay "Class, Status and Party" that dealt with Weber's theory on social stratification. Weber's position on achieving power through caste and class allowed him to effectively delineate with hierarchy and differences embedded with social structure. In fact, the use of caste in Weber's theory has a direct relevance to students of sociology of social stratification in India. Andre Beteille has used this model to empirically verify it in the context of Tamil Nadu in his work. Much before Beteille, C. W. Mills experimented this theoretical proposition in the context of American society which can be found in his one of most popular work titled *The Power Elite* (1956). In this last book, Mills informs us that elites are the people with extraordinary brilliance and success in their respective fields of operation and located them ruling class, business, government, and military.

The sociology of Mill's was a work in understanding and interpreting the interaction and interrelation between and among individuals, between individual and society and the undercurrents of power play establishing itself in terms of inequality, domination and hegemony. He was also concerned about powerlessness of middle class and a growing trend of apathy among the intellectuals. But the influence of Weber on him never waned and found in his perspective where he regarded that history has a major role to play in providing means to sociological understanding.

In 'Power Elite', treated as an important addition to the elite theory associated with Pareto, Mosca and Michels is a treatise on the role of the centralized agencies over citizens and the way power is hankered for and attained in society by a minuscule minority. Power Elite is a text on power, domination and hegemony in the context of fast modernizing

American society with its focus on capitalism, technology, and media. The diminishing clouds of World War II, the setback in Vietnam, the saga of McCarthyism and the tentacles of cold war significantly altered the texture of American society especially of its intellectual climate. Bureaucratization of society demonstrated during the phase of McCarthyism and technological modernization according to Mills bereft the population from sociological imagination and stunted their ability to correlate personal achievements with societal goals. Taking the power theory and centralization of power further mills espoused the multi-polarity of power structures but their nature and culture remains the same whether they are in bureaucracy, military or corporation. Though Mills did not use the Marxist argument of ‘class-in-itself’ as these three pillars supported each other in condensing power and often collapsed with each other to hold on to power. It was also not an open and naked conflict between ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ rather it was an attempt to marginalize the middle class and refrain other aspirant groups from power through manipulation and machinations of modernity. This has been later vividly described by Hamza Alvi in his work on South Asia.

This tendency of elites, to use forces to their advantage, so that they can gain economic and power meant that they had to extend their sphere of influence and domination from their traditional forte. Perched in the pinnacle of political, corporate and military hierarchy elites had the ambition, opportunity and resources to capture the imagination of people and mould it according to their interest. Mills like other sociologist believed that social institutions like family, church and schools determine our choices, career and ambitions and they are in turn shaped by elites through the interventions and thus, extend their power to the entire gamut society. In the process elites turn these lesser though primary institutions into means for their ends. Much like Gramsci, who described such relations as ‘hegemony’ and Althusser who illustrated the role of government institutions and media as ‘ideological state apparatus’ in instilling and indoctrinating the dominant worldview?

According to Mills this process of passive interference over a period creates, necessary and definite condition of existence for common man reducing him to a self-aggrandizing spoke in the wheels of work-spend circle. This complete domination of our life style and worldview by hijacking our points of interaction at primary level the power elite dictate and determine our conditions of existence both material and ideological. Much like Marx, Mills wrote that such a condition of existence to remain unchallenged requires a degree of legitimacy which comes through media that the elites constantly used to produce, disseminate and popularize the ‘the dominant ideas of the ruling class’ i.e. the world of consumerism.

The most influential and famous work of C. W. Mills is "The Sociological Imagination" which was published in Oxford by Oxford University Press in 1959 became a rage among sociological texts and continue to received significant attention. In the beginning Mills draws attention to public towards sociology and describes how one should approach the world if one wants to see and understand as a sociologist does. The sociologist differs from layman and others from the perspective he uses to perceive the reality. The sociologist according to Mills employs ‘sociological imagination’ in understanding and interpreting the world around him. Mills define sociological imagination as a “quality of mind that allows oneself to intersperse between history and biography”. It is about linking the present with the past at one hand and the personal with public with other. He emphasizes the importance of finding the link between the nuances of everyday mundane life and great forces of social transformation which changes the course of history.

The sociological imagination is a method, a perspective to analyze everyday life and positioned oneself in the broader context of society. Writing in the background of 60s of a fast-changing American society Mills tried to capture the chaos, confusion and individualism of the common man. The setting was perfect in the sense that it was accompanied by surge of radicalism, growing disinterestedness of intellectuals and marginalization of middle class. In the context of this overarching reality Mills felt pulse of the people when he said that everyone things there is a lot of confusion, chaos and difficulty in their life and despite knowing the same they could not get out of this hole. It feels like that they are trapped. This feeling according to Mills is not entirely wrong on the part of the individual because that is what he sees around him. But the problem is that he fails to understand that his surrounding and his field of operation is neither isolated nor insular form the general context rather milieu of his time.

A rise in the price of commodities, a failure of marriage, the specter of unemployment that haunts an ordinary man is a real problem and affect him individually and by extension to his family and there are many people like that. But pushed to the corner he tries to find an answer to his troubles and in failure he gets depressed. This according to Mills is an example of ‘personal trouble’ which confronts individuals time and again as we live in uncertain times. But there are also larger issues those challenge the society viz. war, pestilence, disaster etc. Countries and continents try to find solution to them and probably a means to minimize the damage and they in turn do affect the individuals. A rise in petrol price due to a war in a faraway country is not uncommon fact but a reality that is often passed off by an individual as a disconnected happening without any real implication for him. These for Mills are ‘public issues’. The real problem is the seemingly ‘disconnect’ between ‘personal troubles’ and ‘public issues’ for an ordinary person which results in his inability to perceive the reality beyond the immediate surroundings.

According to Mills, restricted to their private orbit they move vicariously and remain mute spectators. Like a quicksand their efforts to transcend this orbit only push them further down making them trapped further in the furrows of emptiness. Central to this precariousness of private trouble lays the inability to intermingle and transcend biography and history. Biography though means documented experiences of a person, his lived-in world, in Mills description it refers to the sum of life-world lived in a community experiencing life in society. Our biography is the compendium of our personal experiences enriched by our interrelation and interaction with our fellow members of society, our responses to challenges posed by the time, our failure and success making efforts to overcome such challenges. Needless to add many such biographies enriched with multiple challenges and responses create history.

1.5. SUMMARY

- Weber's position on achieving power through caste and class allowed him to effectively delineate with hierarchy and differences embedded with social structure.
- A combination of Weber, Manneheim with Marx's dialectical materialism made a potent methodological application of sociological theories on the political and intellectual life of American society.
- The sociology of Mill's was a work in understanding and interpreting the interaction and interrelation between and among individuals, between individual and society and the undercurrents of power play establishing itself in terms of inequality, domination and hegemony.
- In 'Power Elite', Mills treated as an important addition to the elite theory associated with Pareto, Mosca and Mitchels is a treatise on the role of the centralized agencies over citizens and the way power is hankered for and attained in society by a minuscule minority.

- The sociological imagination is a method, a perspective to analyze everyday life and positioned oneself in the broader context of society.
- For Mills biography and history are intertwined. This understanding of interplay between biography and history entails the sociologist to discover the nuances and subterfuge of social life.

1.6. KEY TERMS

Positivism: a philosophical system recognizing only that which can be scientifically verified or which is capable of logical or mathematical proof, and therefore rejecting metaphysics and theism.

- Power: The ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way.
- Elite: a select group that is superior in terms of ability or qualities to the rest of a group or society.

1.7. QUESTIONS: (SHORT ANSWER TYPE)

1. Who was Gouldner's mentor?
2. Whose theories have received largest criticism from Gouldner?
3. Gouldner was influenced by which sociological tradition?
4. What was the crux of Gouldner's argument?
5. What is the crisis Gouldner is concerned about?
6. Gouldner was highly influenced by which Greek author?
7. Who was a contemporary of Gouldner as a sociologist?
8. Gouldner taught at which University?
9. What the first book of Gouldner?
10. Who was Gouldner's professor under whom he wrote his doctoral dissertation?
11. What is the meaning of elite?
12. Which groups of people are discussed in 'Power elite'?

13. What was the context of Mill's work on Power Elite?
14. What is the meaning of 'sociological imagination'?
15. What promise does sociological imagination holds?
16. What do mean by 'private trouble'?
17. What do you mean by 'public issues'?
18. Which social scientist is a fellow traveler of a sociologist in his field of inquiry?
19. What is social structure?
20. Mills was influenced by which founding father of sociology?

1.8. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Robert Merton
2. Talcott Parsons
3. European?
4. Reflexivity
5. Lack of Reflexivity and growing influence of uncritical functionalism
6. Plato
7. Max Horkheimer, in fact, entire group of sociologists associated with critical theory.
8. Washington University?
9. Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy
10. R. K. Merton
11. People of extraordinary brilliance and influence in their profession
12. Bureaucrats, Industrialist and politicians.
13. Capitalism and dominance of conservatism
14. It is a quality of mind that allows one to link history and biography.
15. To situate oneself in the context where history and biography are interpolated and the opportunity to looking beyond own perimeter of situation.

16. Personal problems affecting an individual in his everyday life.
17. The larger socio-economic and political context.
18. Historian
19. The interrelationship between people, their patterns of interaction and consequent social institutions.
20. Karl Marx

1.9. QUESTIONS: (LONG ANSWER TYPE)

1. Explain the concept of ‘functionalism’ and problems associated with it as discussed by Gouldner?
2. Write a note on intellectual development of Gouldner from a mere a critic of functionalism to a radical thinker.
3. Explaining the concept of ‘reflexivity’ highlight its importance for sociology?
4. Elucidate the influence of Marx on the writings of Goulnder.
5. Why Gouldner thinks that neither Marxism nor functionalism has answer to the problems of sociological theory identified by him.
6. Explaining the concept of ‘sociological imagination’ write a note on its contemporary relevance.
7. Describe the contribution of Mills to the elite theory.
8. Explaining the nuances alternative sociological traditions critically examine the contributions of C. W. Mills.
9. Critically examine the link between history and biography following the lead provided by Mills.
10. Provide a comparative analysis of the contributions of Gouldner and Mills and importance for development of sociological theory.

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UNIT –2

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

Structure

2.0. Introduction of structural Functionalism

2.1. Unit Objectives

2.2. Talcott Parsons - System Theory

2.2.1. The transition from Unit acts to Social System

2.2.2. Institutionalization of Status, Role and Norms

2.2.3. What holds the system together?

2.3. The Pattern Variable

2.3.1. Ascription vs. Achievement

2.3.2. Particularism vs. Universalism

2.3.3. Affective Neutrality vs. Affectivity

2.3.4. Diffuseness vs. Specificity

2.3.5. Collective Orientation vs. Individualism

2.4. Critical Evaluation of Parsonian System Theory

2.5 Summary

2.6. Important Terms to Remember

2.7. The Key Ideas

2.8. Questions and Exercises (Short Type)

2.9. Questions and Exercises (Long Type)

2.10. ‘Check your progress’

2.11. References and further Readings

2.0. INTRODUCTION OF STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

Structural functionalism is a dominant theory of sociology. Structural functionalism often commonly used as functionalism that see society as complex system, an integrated whole consists of different parts or subsystem which work together, contribute towards the smooth running of system, promote solidarity and stability. The supporters of this theory says society can be compared to human organism (Organic Analogy)in which the structure of every part and its function is very important as each part contribute for the existence and stability of the whole i.e. society or social system. Here they give more thrust to maintain social order. And it is performed by all its important social institutions like economy, polity, family, law etc. And its primary elements like norms, values, status and roles. So functionalism is considered as a logical extension of the organic analogies for societies. It explains that why and how society functions the by emphasizing on the relationships between its various institutions.

2.1. UNIT OBJECTIVES

- To acquainted students with the theory of Structural Functionalism
- To understand the social system theory of Talcott Parsons
- To describe the criticism of earlier functionalism by R. K. Merton
- To understand function, non-function and dysfunction
- To understand the Middle Range Theory
- To understand Neo-functionalism by Jeffrey Alexander

2.2. TALCOTT PARSONS (1902-1982) - SYSTEM THEORY

Talcott Parsons was an American sociologist who reviewed the contributions of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber to show the underlying unity in their contributions and thus forwarded his assertion of ‘grand theory’ of social system. Drawing selectively from utilitarianism, positivism, and idealism, he developed his voluntaristic theory of action. This

theory holds that individuals are goal seeking actors, endowed with various alternatives but exposed to situational constraints and governed by norms, values etc. And action is the result of subjective decision of actor's choice of the means accepted to achieve the goals. This orientation of the actor to the situation is the central theme of voluntaristic theory of action.

System refers to any interrelated parts. It can be living or non-living, imaginary or actual. Relationships among these interrelated parts follow certain rules or techniques. In sociology when we use "system" it refers to social, cultural and mental element. It necessarily points out that how various socio-cultural elements are interrelated and form or constitute a whole. According to Parsons a social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the "optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols (Parsons, 1951:5-6). According to Parsons, status and role are two basic units or structural components of the social system. In addition to this, he discussed on other large scale structural components of collectivizes, norms and values. Herbert Spencer whom we treat as an evolutionist may also be described in turner's words as the first general system theorist (Randall Collins, 1997:47). Talcott Parsons 'social system theory particularly refers system as "a self-equilibrating system". According to Parsons "organized pattern of interaction" is called as a system. Parsons's system theory focused on how social system functions in a general way and branded as a "grand theory". It was very popular theory especially in 1950s and then attacked by conflict theory, new Marxism and post modernism.

2.2.1. THE TRANSITION FROM UNIT ACTS TO SOCIAL SYSTEM

According to Parsons one can see there is a movement from unit acts (actor) to social system. This has been explained in Parsonian concepts of action, interaction and institutionalization. Parsons says actor have various motives and values. According to him there are three motives of actors viz. cognitive, cathectic and evaluative. Cognitive motives are meant to need of information; Cathectic motives speak about needs of emotions and evaluative motives stress on evaluation. Three types of values follow these three types of motives. They are cognitive value which focuses on rational type of evaluation in terms of objective standards; Appreciative values which evaluate in terms of aesthetic but subjective standards and Moral values which evaluate in terms of rightness and wrongness. These motives and values form “modes of orientation”. Mode of orientation leads to types of action. According to Parsons on the basis of the said motives and values there are three corresponding actions viz. Instrumental (which focus on unequivocal and clear goals more rationally) expressive (action focus on satisfaction of emotions) and moral (action based on norms of right and wrong). He says ones action depends on his motivational and value orientation. For example instrumental content in a actor will be dominant if he is primarily oriented towards cognitive motives and value.

Here Parsons says unit acts/actors involved with various orientations on basis of three motives and values and these variously oriented actors then interact with each others. In the process of interaction they develop common agreements and forms patterned interaction which later becomes “institutionalized”. Parsons said this final institutionalized pattern (of status, role and norms) is called as “Social System”.

*Mode of Orientation → Types of Action→ Interaction among oriented actors
→Institutionalization of interaction →Social System*

2.2.2. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF STATUS, ROLE AND NORMS

When interactions institutionalized it becomes a system. Parsons explain institutionalization both as a process and a structure. Institutionalization is a process through which the interactions are oriented, patterned, a social structure is built up and maintained. As interactions become institutionalized, a social system exists. By system Parsons not necessarily focused on the entire society, it may be any organized pattern of interaction whether a micro or macro form is called as system (Turner: 65).

As a grand theory Parsons's system theory was very abstract. Because system is consisting of various subsystems, Parsons was more concerned with the basic functions that must be fulfilled by subsystems to maintain the smooth running of social system. This is well explained by him through LIGA or AGIL model/scheme.

External			
A(Mean)	Economy	Polity	G (End)
L(Mean)	Family Education Religion	Community Law Norms	I (End)
Internal			

A - stand for adaptation, a complex of activities directed towards meeting the need of the system by taking resources from environment; G –stands for goal attainment, the setting of goals for the system; I –stands for integration, the maintenance of internal order; L- stands for latency or pattern maintenance, the generation of sufficient motivation to perform tasks. In order to meet each of these functional prerequisites, various sub-systems develop. For example the economy sub system performs the function of adaptation, Polity subsystem fulfils the goal attainment function, Social sub-system fulfils the function of integration, i.e. keeping all its part together and the cultural sub system fulfils the latency functions.

The scheme /model of Parsons are designed very abstractly on the basis of two dichotomous dimensions like internal/external and means/ends. One can find that in a system everything is functioning either in internal or external direction and it may be treated either as means or ends.

Collins remarks that Parsons's model of AGIL thus can be better understood in the backdrop of functional analysis, in which the society can fulfill all its required needs through mainly four sub-systems (Collins, 1997:58).

In L, one can see the institutions which are maintaining the cultural pattern of the society as well as helping for the socialization of individual members who constitute society. Generally all these sub-systems like family, education and religion are giving a structural shape to social relationships.

Under - I, one can find there are various institutions/sub-systems like community, law and norms which are helping for the smooth running of the system. Community is the basic and foundation of human association which facilitates for an enduring integration and living. Along with this law and norms with their prescriptions regulate the human living and facilitates for integration and stability in society. These are both internal to the system as they deal with the inner relationships within the society itself.

In this dimension, the basic cultural patterns which are maintained by the sub-systems/institutions are shown in box L are very primary and hence regarded as 'means', while the actual result comes through integration, operated through various sub-systems/institutions are shown in box –I and hence called as "ends".

The top part of the table is included in the external dimension. For example in box-A, economy sub-system deals with the external world, adapt the economic material inputs and try in the best possible way to fulfill the economic/physical needs of the system. It again acts as the basic element to satisfy the primary need of the system so treated as "means". On the

other hand in the box G- is attached to the external physical world, so it has the external dimension. G (Goal attainment) act externally to see that system's output or goal is properly achieved in relation to the physical world or environment. This is chiefly satisfied by the subsystem of polity and according to Parsons it is an "end". Thus we see that how the system is developed into four subsystems according to his LIGA/AGIL scheme can also be applied in the similar manner independently for a single subsystem (box) as well. So a particular subsystem like economy or polity can also be divided once again into four functional units to fulfill its own internal functions through LIGA/AGIL scheme.

We can conclude that Parsonian theory claims that social organizations have to take care of all these four basic functions, if it is to survive. All these functions are necessary and a smooth function of system primarily depends on how these functional prerequisites are fulfilled by these four sub-systems.

2.2.3 WHAT HOLDS THE SYSTEM TOGETHER?

What holds the system together is a very important, complex and multi dimensional process? According to Collins Parsons gave importance to "socialization" which primarily teaches and ensure that the actors/individuals will properly fulfill their assigned responsibilities in order to run the system smoothly. Socialization is the process through which actors/individuals learn the basic values, norms, roles and sanctions of the system. There is a hierarchy of control within the system (Collins, 1997:61). This follows like this:

Values



Norms



Roles



Sanctions

The system lays down certain basic values. In Indian society, “Morals” for example, is considered one of the most basic values. This has laid down the basic cultural pattern of Indian society. In family everyone learn the basic value of morality and internalize it for our growth of personality. Family socializes the individuals to make morality as a way of life. In every school it became a “norm” to learn morality. It also a normative framework for one’s entire life. So this normative pattern converts to “role”. When an individual became a member of any organization he/she is expected to take this role with a morality and integrity. And all organizations enforce the rules to follow these roles by applying various “sanctions” either by rewarding who follow the roles or punishing the members who does not follow it. So fixing the basic values is very important to maintain the system, which primarily takes place through the process of socialization.

2.3. THE PATTERN VARIABLE

In AGIL/LIGA scheme, Parsons have explained about the general structure of any system. It is an elaboration of concepts implicit in *The Social System*. However, whatever differences one can find among systems according to Parsons is due to the pattern variables which provide dichotomous choices to individuals to choose one. The overall analysis of LIGA/AGIL model/scheme is treated by Parsons as the whole scheme of “The General Theory of Action”. This was at the centre of discourse in sociology until the mid of 1970s. Parsons basic focus here was “social action”, the primary element which is very crucial for the relationships between the actions and their environment both societal and material to which it consistently gives meaning.

The concept that connects basic action and social system is that of pattern variables. Parsons refers these are fundamental dilemmas that human actions face in different situations.

Social system may be characterized by the combinations of solutions offered to these dilemmas like:

1. Ascription vs. Achievement
2. Particularism vs. Universalism
3. Affective Neutrality vs. Affectivity
4. Specificity vs. Diffuseness/Diffusion
5. Collective Orientation vs. Individualism

2.3.1. ASCIPTION VS. ACHIEVEMENT

Is the position of individual ‘ascribed’ to him /her by virtue of their age, sex, caste, race, clan etc.(ascription) or the position are achieved through individual’s skill, performance and intelligence (achievement).

2.3.2. PARTICULARISM VS. UNIVERSALISM

Does one evaluate others according to his personal connotation and community consideration (particularism) or through the impartial and universal standard (universalism).

2.3.3. AFFECTIVE NEUTRALITY VS. AFFECTIVITY

For instrumental reasons actors can involve in a relationship without the involvement of any emotional feelings (affective neutrality) or they may involve with emotional feelings (affectivity).

2.3.4. DIFFUSENESS VS. SPECIFICITY

Actors can choose, from across a wide range of activity (diffuseness) or only from specific, structured activities (specificity).

2.3.5. COLLECTIVE ORIENTATION VS. INDIVIDUALISM

It denotes the extent to which action is focused on for larger group interests and goals (collective orientation) or it is oriented to self interest and individual goals (individualism).

Turner believes that the intent of pattern variables is to categorize dichotomies of decisions, normative demands and value orientations. However, in *The Social System*, Parsons is inclined to view them as value orientations that circumscribe the norms of the social system and the decisions of the personality system (Turner, 2015:66).

In short Parsons has explained a complex conceptual system that has given focus on the process of institutionalization of interactions into stabilized patterns called social systems, which are penetrated by personality and circumscribed by culture (Turner, 2015:66)

2.4. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF PARSONIAN SYSTEM THEORY

- It is very difficult to understand the complex functioning of a social system without examining the interchanges among its constituent sub-systems like AGIL(Economy, Polity, Family, Law) since the interchanges are influenced by exchanges among constituent and other systems in the environment.
- Parsonian theory has not discussed very comprehensively to social change. Mostly it is either silent or limited towards the social change in system. His description of four sub functional systems and their integration for establishing order led to the accusation that he has offered a theory that was unable to explain social change.
- In 1960s a number of critiques had began to question whether Parsons emerging “system of concepts” correspond to the events of the real world.
- Such an image of society that there is always a perfect integration among its components is utopian because then the occurrence of commonly experienced phenomena like deviance, conflict and change becomes limited.
- Parsons's functionalist grand theory could not question the way in which it can cope with the unintended consequences of social action.

‘Check your progress’

1. Who defined pattern variable?
2. What is AGIL?

2.5. SUMMARY

Jeffrey Alexander rejected micro theories which starts with voluntary agency and build towards the macro levels (like Interactionism) because they were unable to account the basic character of the collective phenomena. At the same time he also rejected “collectivist”, “rationalist”, “materialist” theories that emphasised on the coercive order and eliminated the individual freedom. He also emphasised that the collective order and individual freedom (voluntarism) has to be combined with the normative rather than the rationalist tradition. In his essay Neo Functionalism and After, Jeffrey Alexander argues that it is not a project with an end in itself. His aim was to re-establish the legitimacy of the Parsonian Theory in which he had succeeded. He said he is ready to move beyond neo-functionalism and Parson though his basic commitment remains unchanged. However on his later career Jeffrey Alexander turned towards themes like Civil Society, though he understood it as a realm of interactions outside the economy and state. The failure of the structures like state and the themes like civil society lies outside the scope of Neo-Functionalism.

2.6. IMPORTANT TERMS TO REMEMBER

Structural Functionalism

Structure

Function

Pattern Variable

Manifest and Latent Function

Non-Function and Dysfunction

Neo Functionalism

Action – Instrumental and Materialist Vs. Normative and Idealist

Order - Collective Vs. Individual

Multi Dimensional and Synthetic View of Society

2.7. THE KEY IDEAS

- Functionalism thinks about society as an integrated social system made up of various subsystem
- The integrity of the social system depends on necessary functions carried out by various subsystems and the level of their integration.
- Talcott Parsons developed the most sophisticated and systematic account of society as a social system
- The smallest component of system is the unit act, which is made-up of a social actor who aims to satisfy particular ends with the help of particular means prescribed for him/her in specific social context.
- The largest components of the system are the behavioural system, the personality system, the social system and the cultural system.
- These four systems are tied to the four functional prerequisites of Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration and Latency (AGIL in short).
- Parsons views that in social system social actors has to consider various value-choices (pattern-variable).
- Talcott Parsons structural functionalist theory confronts difficulty in explaining dysfunctions/non-functions in the system arising from unintended consequences or

conflicting situations and social change.

- R.K. Merton reviewed the essential postulates of earlier functional analysis, criticised, refuted and modified the postulate of unity, universalism and indispensability.
- Merton argues that functional unity is a matter of degree. Its extent must be determined by investigation and proper verification rather than simply beginning with the assumption that it exists.
- Functionalist analysis should see that any part of society may be functional, dysfunctional or non-functional.
- Merton has replaced the notion of indispensability with an alternative concept of ‘functional equivalents’ or ‘functional alternatives’.
- Further he states that these functions and dysfunctions may be either manifest (consequences that are intended and recognised by members) or latent (unintended, unrecognized consequences about which members are not aware).
- Merton has provided the most important criticism to the Grand theory of Parsons
- Middle-range theory, developed by Robert K. Merton, is an approach to sociological theorizing aimed at integrating theory and empirical research.
- Middle range theory is situated between simple statistical or observational regularities and grand theories based on abstract entities.
- With the introduction of the middle range theory program, he advocated that sociologists should concentrate on measurable aspects of social reality that can be studied as separate social phenomena, rather than attempting to explain the entire social world.
- Middle range theories are normally constructed by applying theory building techniques to empirical research, which produce generic propositions about the social

world, which in turn can also be empirically tested.

2.8. QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES (SHORT TYPE)

- What is social system?
- What is the smallest unit of system?
- What are the largest elements of system?
- What is Pattern variable?
- What is the importance of pattern variables described by Parsons?
- Give examples of function, non-function and dysfunction?
- What is manifest function?
- What is latent function?
- What is middle range theory?
- What is neo-functionalism?

2.9. QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES (LONG TYPE)

- Discuss the structural functionalist perspective of Talcott Parsons.
- Critically evaluate the social system theory of Parsons
- Discuss the criticism of R. K. Merton to the earlier structural functionalist theory
- Discuss the manifest and latent function as explained by Merton with suitable examples.
- Write a note on Merton's middle range theory
- Discuss the neo-functionalism theory discussed by J. Alexander.
- Discuss in detail about the criticism of structural functionalist theory.
- What are the criticisms of structural functionalism that lead to neo-functionalism?
- How neo-functionalism overcome the critique on structural functionalism?

- What is the Integrative Model of Jeffrey Alexander?
- Discuss about the future prospects of neo-functionalism?
- Write a brief note on the intellectual influences on Jeffrey C Alexander?
- What are the major similarities and differences between structural functionalism and neo-functionalism?

2.10. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Talcott Parsons
2. Adaptations, Goal Attainment, Integration, Latency
3. Jaffrey C. Alexander

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UNIT-3

CONFLICT THEORY

Structure

3.0. Introduction

3.1. Unit Objectives

3.2. Marx Critique and dialectics of conflict: Ralf Dahrendorf (1929-2009)

3.3 Functional analysis of Conflict: Lewis Coser (1913-2003)

3.4. Conflict and social change: Randall Collins (1941-)

3.5. Let us sum up

3.6. Key Terms

3.7. Questions: (Short answer types)

3.8. Questions: (Long answer types)

3.9. ‘Check your progress’

3.10. References and Suggested Readings

3.0. INTRODUCTION

Conflict theory is often considered in the spirit of Neo-Marxist perspective. In this domain the Neo-Marxist are the sociologists whose work has been motivated by Marxist theory. But nevertheless, they develop a distinctive approach of their own by distinguishing them from the conventional Marxist theory.

Conflict theory has its origin even in the work of Max Weber, who discarded Marxian view that the differentiation between the owner and non-owners of the property (means of economic production) was central to class formation and division in the society. Rather he argued that there are several criteria for the division of classes in society and even there are numerous divisions found within the two basic classes considering the market context in modern capitalist society.

Conflict theory states that social conflicts arise when scarce resources and power are unevenly distributed among different groups in society which ultimately leads to social change. The origin of conflict theory dates back to the theoretical works of Karl Marx who analyzed the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie or the capitalist class who own the means of production and the proletariat who are the working class or the poor. Marx suggested that society is always in a state of conflict due to competition among different groups for scarce resources. Those who have power and authority tend to dominate those who are poor and powerless resulting conflict between the two groups. However, Max Weber further developed Karl Marx's ideas of conflict and suggested that there are multiple aspects to conflict that exist in a society. He argued that conflict tends to generate solidarity among individuals and groups in a society and the individual or group's response to conflict varies which depends upon the level of association they have with the group.

There are four underlying assumptions that help in providing a better explanation of conflict theories in the form of competition, revolution, structural inequality and war. According to conflict theorists, competition occurs almost in every human relationship and interaction. Competition exists among different groups to express their rights over access to material as well as intangible resources which are limited in society. Revolution is one of the outcomes of conflict between two social groups which emphasizes that change in power dynamics results from conflict that are sudden and radical in nature. Structural inequalities in society help some individuals or groups retaining more power and exercising their authorities over the others who are marginalized. They work to maintain those structures to retain their power. War which is a result of increasing conflict between the individuals or groups which tends to either unify a society or responsible for its complete destruction.

In sum, conflict theories were aimed at providing an alternative explanation to structural functionalism which gained popularity during 1950s and 60s. Conflict theories were oriented towards the study of structures and institutions in society. The unequal distribution of scarce resources and power in society were the central concerns of conflict theory. Conflict theorists viewed power as the fundamental feature of society and were of the opinion that power is the primary factor that guides society and social relations. However, conflict theory could not succeed in completely isolating itself from structural functionalism and faced similar kind of criticism.

3.1. UNIT OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the unit is to orient the readers about the major theoretical works of conflict theorists; Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser and Randall Collins by providing them in-depth conceptual and theoretical understandings. At the end of the unit, the readers are expected to develop solid conceptual clarity and have sound theoretical understandings about the key works of the conflict theorists in sociology.

3.2. MARX CRITIQUE AND DIALECTICS OF CONFLICT: RALF DAHRENDORF (1929-2009)

Conflict theory was very strappingly influenced by the work of Dahrendorf. He basically criticized the Marxian analysis of class division and the concomitant class conflict in post-capitalist era. He argued Marxian explanation of class division was accepted and applicable to 19th century but it has become outdated in 20th century especially to explain conflict in society.

Dahrendorf claimed that important changes have taken place in various countries like USA and Britain and they are now post-capitalist society in which one may not find the class polarization as Marx predicted, rather the opposite has happened here and other parts of the globe. In post-capitalistic era we can find there is a diversification of classes. The number of skilled and semi-skilled workers has significantly increased. As well as, the middle class or “white collar workers” has also increased. The link between ownership and control in industry had been broken. Managers rather than owners exercised the day-to-day control in industry. Marx’s claim that conflict was based upon the ownership or non-ownership of wealth or means of economic production is now no longer valid because there is no longer a close association between acquisition of wealth and power prevails. Share holders for example might own property in an industry but in practice they didn’t exercise any strong control over the management. Rather it is the skilled management or managers they hold much power to run the industry. In this regard, Dahrendorf argued that conflict is now no longer based upon the inequality in ‘class structure’ but found in ‘authority structure’.

The functional theorists were of the opinion that every society is static or in equilibrium state. However, to Dahrendorf, each society is subject to change. While the functionalists argued for equilibrium approach to the problem of social order and viewed that every elements of society contributes to its stability, conflict theorists particularly Dahrendorf

are of the opinion that conflict is an integral part of social system, universally present in all human relations and social elements contribute to change. Like Talcott Parsons, Dahrendorf was concerned with the issue of social order particularly, in the role of power in maintaining order in society. Dahrendorf argued that it is power that defines and enforces the guiding principles of society. Accordingly to him, society has two faces i.e. conflict and consensus. He proposed that sociological theory should be divided into two parts i.e. conflict theory and consensus theory. Further, he proposed that the role of conflict theorists should be to examine the conflict of interest and coercion that holds the society together while consensus theorists should examine value integration in society. He strongly believed that society cannot exist without conflicts and consensus which are the fundamental prerequisites for each other.

Dahrendorf also noted that to functionalists, the social system is held together by voluntary cooperation or general consensus. However, for conflict theorists, society is held together by “entrenched constraints”. Thus, some positions in society are delegated power and authority over others. This led Dahrendorf to his central theory that differential distribution in authority in variety becomes the determining factor of systematic social conflict (Dahrendorf, 1959). He further recognized that “continuity is without a doubt one of the fundamental puzzles of social life and social order is the result of constraint rather than some consensus around social beliefs”.

The concepts of power and authority were of special interest to Dahrendorf. He defined power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests”. He called power as factual which is a fact of human life. Authority to him of course is a form of power but is legitimate power which is always associated with social positions or roles. Authority is part of social organization, not individual personality. He was of the opinion that various positions within society have different amount of authority which

does not reside in the individual but in its positions. The primary task of conflict analysis was to examine various authority roles in the society. “The structural origin of such conflicts must be sought in the arrangement of the social roles endowed with expectations of domination and subjection (*Ibid*). Therefore, authority always implies both super-ordination and subordination. People expect the position of authority to control sub ordinates. However, authority is not a permanent social phenomenon but is legitimate. Therefore, sanction can be brought to bear against those who do not comply with it. Authority is not constant and it resides with the position but not with person. Dahrendorf suggested that society consists of a number of imperatively coordinated associations. An individual can occupy a position of authority in one society and a subordinate position in another society. Only two conflict groups can be formed within any association. Those who are in position of authority and those in subordinate position hold certain interests that are contradicting in substance and direction.

Dahrendorf was of the opinion that social relationships are coordinated through authority and power everywhere. He argued that everyone is involved in positions and groups with latent interest. People with identical role interest are called quasi groups. Interest groups are formed from large quasi groups. They are the real agent of group conflict who has structure, function and purpose or goal. Conflict groups emerge from all interest groups. The latent interest or unconscious role expectation further becomes manifest interest or latent interest which has become conscious. However, to Dahrendorf, for the groups to become active in conflict, there are three pre conditions to be met i.e. technical, political and social conditions. The technical conditions include members, ideas and ideologies and norms without which the groups can't function which define a social group. The political condition refers to the ability to meet and organise as a group. Social conditions have two elements which are communication and structural pattern of recruitment in a group. The more

communication occurs among people in quasi group, the more they form a social or interest group.

Dahrendorf strongly believed that conflict leads to change and development in society. He felt that once conflict group emerge, they engage in actions that lead to changes in social structure. He further argued that the more intense the conflict becomes, the more radical are the changes. If the conflicts are combined with violence, structural changes become sudden. However, he believed that conflict vary in its intensity and the level of violence it generates. Conflict intensity refers to the amount of cost such as life, materials, infrastructure that is lost due to conflict and involvement of people in the level of importance and value they associate with the group. Conflict violence refers to how conflict is manifested and measured by the kinds of weapon used in conflict.

In sum, Dahrendorf concluded that every society is subjected to change at every moment and experiences social conflict at every moment. Every element in a society contributes to its change and every society rests on constraint of some of its members by others. The tasks of social conflict theory in sociology should be formulated with reference to a plausible and demonstrable explanation of empirical phenomena and it should enable us to derive social conflicts from structural arrangements (Dahrendorf, 1958).

3.3. FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT: LEWIS COSER (1913-2003)

Lewis Coser's attempts to theorize social conflict is partly based on the works of Georg Simmel. For Coser, conflict is a normal and functional part of human live in every society. However, conflict among humans varies that of with the animals as it is oriented towards achieving certain goals and further opens up new opportunities for negotiations and different levels of conflicts. Social conflicts arise from the unequal distributions of scarce resources and power. The main sources of conflict come from the works of Karl Marx. Marx in general was concerned by a group's sense of deprivation caused by a class. This sense of

deprivation leads the group to class consciousness and ultimately results in conflict and social change. According to Marx, conflicts lead not only to ever-changing relations within the existing social structure, but the total social system undergoes transformation through conflict (Coser, 1957). However, for Max Weber, the sources of social conflicts are class, status and change. Like Weber, Georg Simmel also pointed out to the crosscutting influences those results with different forms of inequality. Coser's work sheds lights on the form of deprivation by defining it in to two forms i.e. absolute deprivation and relative deprivation. Absolute deprivation refers to the condition of being poor and living in destitute condition with limited access to food, shelter, clothing and other material resources. He suggested that people in these conditions have neither the resources nor the will power to get involved in conflict and social change. On the other hand, relative deprivation refers to the sense of feeling marginalized in relation to some other person or group. In this context, being in the condition of underprivileged does not matter to the person or group rather they feel that someone else is doing better and they are losing out something. This feeling motivates the group to involve in conflict and social change. Coser further pointed out two factors i.e. emotional involvement and transcendent goals which can result in violent forms of social conflict. He stressed that the conflict in order to become more violent, people must be emotionally engaged in it. The likelihood of violent conflict further depends on if goals of the group are larger than the immediate concerns that matter their daily lives.

Coser was concerned with two kinds of functional consequences of conflict i.e. internal conflict and external conflict. According to him, internal conflict occurs between or among groups that exist in the same social system whereas external conflict occurs between or among two or more different groups. Internal conflict is much frequent that happens in the lower level to release hostilities and keeps conflict from becoming disintegrative for the social system which produces norms governing the conflict. Coser viewed that internal

conflict to become functional; it depends on the types of conflict and social structures it operates in. In the case of external conflict, the bonding of the group becomes stronger; the group members experience greater solidarity and exercise of power more intensely. When a group involves in external conflict, internal solidarity among the group members becomes stronger and they feel greater sense of emotional ties with each other and follow group norms, symbols and behavior. They also tend to produce a more centralized power structure.

Coser pointed out that not all social system contains the same degree of conflict and strain. The sources and incidences of conflicting behavior in each particular system vary according to the type of structure, the patterns of social mobility, of ascribing and achieving status and of allocating scarce power and wealth as well as the degree to which a specific form of distribution of power, resources and status is accepted by the component actors within the different sub-systems. But if, within any social structure, there exist an excess of claimants over opportunities for adequate reward, there arises strain and conflict (Coser, 1957).

Coser also distinguished the characteristics between realistic and unrealistic conflict. Realistic conflicts arise due to frustrations of specific demands and are pursued as a means towards achieving certain goals. On the other hand, in unrealistic conflicts, the antagonist simply tries to release the tension. In this case, the conflicts are not oriented towards attaining specific goals which is due to release of aggressiveness as a response to the frustrations. Coser further suggested that the closer the relationship among the members, the more intense becomes the conflict. Close social relationship resulting ambivalence often gives rise to very strong feelings and intense conflicts. The fear of intense conflict likely leads the group to suppress their hostile feelings, thereby making the conflict more intense. However, closeness of relationship and strong mutual attachment sometimes forces groups to avoid conflict as conflict often has the potential to bring unity. According to him, groups and societies having

less rigid structure that are able to avoid conflict over core ideologies tend to be more stable in nature.

Coser was of the opinion that conflict with outside group tends to increase the internal cohesion of in-groups. Social systems that lack solidarity may disintegrate in war like conflict with outside group. However, conflicts may often lead to formation of coalitions and associations between previously unrelated groups. In the case of several groups facing a common opponent, the groups tend to develop solidarity and become united. Coser further suggested that conflict tends to be dysfunctional in that social structure there is insufficient tolerance or institutionalization of conflict. Highly intense conflict that threatens to tear apart society tends to arise only in rigid social structures. Thus, what threatens social structures is not conflict as such, but rather the rigid character of that structure (Coser, 1956). No group can be entirely harmonious, for then it would lack process and structure. Group formation is a result of both association and dissociation, so that both conflict and cooperation serve as a social function. Some certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation (*Ibid*).

Coser further stated that conflict tends to have stabilizing and integrative functions in the case of loosely structured groups in a flexible society trying to resolve conflicts between antagonists. The multiple forms of conflicts these groups face may lead them to eliminate causes of disassociation and bring unity among the groups. The groups achieve tolerance and institutionalization of conflict which is a stabilizing mechanism. Moreover, conflict with some groups may lead to formation of coalition and association with other groups. Such coalition and association help in uniting the individuals and group by reducing the hostility and social tension. Such social structures which exist multiple conflicts help in bringing together antagonistic parties by involving them in social activities. Societies come up with mechanisms to channelize discontents and hostilities while trying to keep the relationship

normal among antagonistic groups. These mechanisms operate thorough “safety-valve” institutions which serve to maintain social structure and the individual’s security system.

‘Check your progress’

1. Who suggested that conflict has a functional importance in society?

3.4. CONFLICT AND SOCIAL CHANGE: RANDALL COLLINS (1941-)

Randall Collins’s contribution to conflict theory was to add a micro level to the macro theories. He demonstrated that stratification and organization are grounded in the interactions of everyday life. He distinguished conflict from its ideological ground and focused on its realistic ground. He proposed that conflict is perhaps the central process of social life. Collins work on conflict was primarily grounded on individual or micro point of view. He was of the opinion that sociology can’t be successful on the micro level alone and conflict theory in particular can’t do without having societal level of analysis. For him, social structures were integral part of actors who create them along with social organizations.

Collins stated that human beings are sociable but conflict prone animals which are the basic insight for conflict theory. There exists conflict in society because violent coercion is always a potential resource and being coerced is an intrinsically unpleasant experience. Therefore, any use of coercion even by a small minority group induces conflict in the form of antagonism which is dominant. He further added that in a society, every individual peruses his or her own interests wherein power is involved in many situations and these interests are inherently antagonistic. To Collins, every individual maximizes his subjective status according to the resources available to him and his rivals. In each sphere, we look for the actual pattern of personal interaction, the resources available to the persons in different positions, and how these affect the line of attack they take for furthering their personal status.

The ideal and beliefs of persons in different positions thus emerge as personal ideologies, furthering their dominance and serving for their psychological protection (1975).

Collins (1994) consolidated his theoretical works into four main points of conflict theory which are as follows:

1. The unequal distribution of each scarce resource produces potential conflict between those who control it and those who don't.
2. Potential conflict becomes actual conflicts to the degree that opposing groups become mobilized.
3. Conflict endangers subsequent conflicts.
4. Conflict diminishes as resources for mobilization are used up.

Collins emphasized on social stratification because it is an institution that touches many features of life such as wealth, politics, career, family, club, communities and lifestyles. He argued that theories of stratification including the Marxist theory in particular are a failure because it is a mono-causal explanation for a multi-causal world. However, he found Weber's theory to somewhat useful to him because his focus was to study of social stratification in small scale (Collins, 1975). Collins tried to propose a micro sociology of social stratification dealing with individual level at small scale level, but started with Marxist and Weberian theories of stratification as a background to his work.

He argued that it was Marx who first viewed that the material conditions in earning a living are the key determinants for a person's relationship with private property in a modern society. Those people who own or control private property are able to earn their living in a much more satisfactory manner than those who don't. But they sell their labour to gain access to the modes of production. The material conditions of life also affects different social groups as the dominant social classes are able to develop better networks and ideological systems than the subordinate classes which are often imposed on the later. For Collins, Weber was

also important as he emphasized that the state was the agency which controls the means of violence that shifted attention from means of production to conflict over the state. Further, Collins believed that conflict can occur in religion which is a social arena of emotional product and can be used as a weapon in social conflict.

Collins tried to propose his conflict approach to social stratification which has more common grounds with phenomenological and ethno methodological theories than with Marxian and Weberian theories. This can be summarized in three basic principles viz. that people live in self-constructed subjective world, that other people may have the power to affect or control an individual's subjective experience, and interpersonal conflict arises due to the fact that other people try to control the individual who tries to oppose them. Based on these principles, Collins further provided five principles to the conflict approach to social stratification which are; (1) conflict theory must be focused on real life rather than abstract formulations, (2) conflict theory of social stratification must examine the material arrangements that affect interaction, (3) in the situation of resource inequality, the groups who control resources are likely to exploit the ones who do not have any control over resources, (4) conflict theorists should look at cultural phenomena such as beliefs and ideals from the perspectives of interests, resources and power and (5) there should be a firm commitment to the scientific study of social stratification and every other aspects of the social world.

'Check your progress'

2. Who consolidated his theoretical works into four main points of conflict theory?

3.5. LET US SUM UP

- Conflict theory states that the origin of social conflicts lies with unequal distribution of scarce resources and power among different groups in society that leads to social change.
- Karl Marx, the father of conflict theory suggested that society always witnesses conflict due to competition among different groups for scarce resources.
- Max Weber argued that conflict tends to generate solidarity among individuals and groups in a society and the individual or group's response to conflict varies from person to person.
- Dahrendorf suggested that imperatively coordinated associations are organizational groups which have different power relations. They set up latent interests which tend to become manifest interest when a group meets the conditions of group organization.
- Coser argued that internal conflicts serve to release hostilities, create norms for regulating conflict whereas external conflicts tend to develop strong solidarity among group members.
- Collins argued that human beings in every society are sociable but conflict prone animals which are the basic foundation of conflict theory. Conflict exists in society because of violent coercion which is always a potential resource and being coerced is an intrinsically unpleasant experience.

3.6. KEY TERMS

- **Power:** It is the ability to order or accomplish a goal or to influence others.
- **Authority:** It refers to the claim of legitimacy, the justification and right to exercise the power.

- **Conflict:** It refers to the struggle for agency or power in society. Social conflict occurs when two or more actors or groups oppose each other in social interaction competing with other to achieve their own goals.

3.7. SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Write a short note on the types of social conflicts proposed by Ralf Dahrendorf.
- Write a short note on the functions of social conflict proposed by Lewis Coser.
- Write a short note on the causes of conflict in society proposed by Randall Collins.
- Write a short note on major criticism of conflict theory.

3.8. LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- Critically analyze the work of Ralf Dahrendorf.
- Critically analyze the work of Lewis Coser.
- Critically analyze the work of Randall Collins

3.9. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Lewis Coser
2. Randall Collins

3.10. REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS:

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UNIT- 4

STRUCTURALISM AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

STRUCTURE

4.0. Introduction

4.1. Unit Objectives

4.2. Structuralism and the contribution of Claude Levi-Strauss

4.2.1. The Structure of the Human Mind

4.2.2. The Structural Analysis of Myth and Binary Oppositions

4.3. Check Your Progress/Self-Assessment Questions 1

4.4. The move to Post-Structuralism

4.4.1. Derrida Discourse and Deconstruction

4.4.2. Foucault and the Genealogy of Knowledge

4.5. Check Your Progress/Self-Assessment Questions 2

4.6. Let us sum up

4.7. Key Terms

4.8. Answer to ‘Check your progress’

4.9. Self-assessment questions

4.9.1. Short-Answer Questions

4.9.2. Long Answer Questions

4.10. Further readings/suggested readings

4.0. INTRODUCTION

In this unit which follows we shall first take up structuralism and then post-structuralism. The idea of the structuralism and post-structuralism are no longer a novelty in social theory. Themes which had been the complex concerns of an avant-garde in the late 1950s exploded into an intellectual craze-cum-publishing bonanza in the early 1990s are now part of the standard repertoire of social theory and cognate disciplines. The question arises here is that since the idea of structuralism and post-structuralism has become both a familiar and a contentious part of the intellectual landscape, so how we should assess its significance for social theory? Also, we shall see how different theories are associated with these two strands of contemporary approaches to the study of individual, society and culture. These questions are explored in the sections below. The first section sketches the idea of the structuralism in social theory while drawing the insights from Claude Levi-Strauss. Having discussed at length Levi-Strauss' concept of structure, the analysis of myth and binary opposites; the next two sections address the idea of post-structuralism, influenced by two most important thinkers of twentieth century: Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. A concluding section pulls together the threads of the argument and spells out what the structuralism and post-structuralism might entail.

4.1. UNIT OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss structuralism and post-structuralism approaches to the study of human nature and cultural diversity
- describe Levi-Strauss' concept of structure and technique of studying the various aspects of culture
- define the concept of myth, binary opposites as explained by Levi-Strauss
- explain the shift to post-structuralism

- discuss the views of Derrida and Foucault on post-structuralism

4.2. STRUCTURALISM AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS

The basic idea of structuralism was of language as a self-contained system whose elements are ‘signs’, the identity of which is determined relationally within the system. The aim was to extend this beyond language to encompass other facets of social life. Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009), founded structuralism in anthropology, and whose work was influential for Parisian structuralism generally. Levi-Strauss claimed inspiration from Durkheim’s thought about social facts, Freudian view of psychology and Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistics. Consciousness is not amenable to scientific analysis in the view of structuralists. In fact, the structuralists wanted to remove people from the centre of social sciences and at the same substitute various structures, such as the logical structures of mind, language, various components of society and society in general. Most of the structuralists view that the focus on people particularly on their subjective processes retards, if not prevents, the development of social sciences. When one very closely observes the structures that interest Levi Strauss is a kind of neo-Kantianism, a philosophically anthropology concerned with the categories of thought.

In his work, various types of structures are analysed. The first and foremost point which Levi-Strauss tried to insist is that, the large scale structures and institutions which exist in the social world, are not structures. Second, they serve to conceal the real underlying structures of society where the social scientist constructs a model in order to get the underlying structure of society. The third type of structure is the structure of human mind. To Levi-Strauss the most fundamental predicament is the understanding of the modes of human thought. His notion of structure is an ordered arrangement of parts or components.

Levi-Strauss went further to apply structuralism more broadly to all forms of communication. He aimed at reconceptualizing a wide array of social phenomena as a system

of communication and makes them amenable to structural analysis. For example, the practice of exchange of spouses can be analyzed in the same way as exchange of words. Therefore, through the structural anthropology both exchanges can be studied. One can illustrate the similarities which exist between linguistic system and kinship systems. Firstly, to the structuralists, the terms used to describe kinship like phonetic in language are basic units of analysis. In fact, neither the kinship terms nor phonetic do have meaning in their lives. Instead both acquire meaning only when they are integral parts of larger system. Secondly, every component part is given a meaning by the overall structure of the system. In the opinion of Levi-Strauss, from setting to setting there is empirical variation in both the systems of phonetic and kinship. Finally, he feels that sense of structure of both phonetic system and kinship system are products of structures of mind. Moreover, they are not the products of unconscious, logical structure of mind.

For him, all societies including modern ones have the same type of underlying structure. Since, it is easier to discover the structure; he focused his attention on primitive society. In order to conceal structural realities, in modern society, a series of conscious models have been developed. But these models were not totally denied by Levi-Strauss. These normative systems or conscious models including biases and distortions are important products of people who live in society. Any way the primary importance is not to be given to the systems, because one should not forget that “cultural norms are not by themselves structures”.

Levi-Strauss is different from other anthropologists, as other anthropologists study what people say or do but he is more concerned with human products. More than anything he was interested in the objective structure of these products and not in their subjective meaning. With regard to structures, each observer, depending upon his ability constructs his own structure. Here, two important points have to be made clear. The first point is that the

structure is the creation of observers. Second, the structures that one created do not exist in the real world. Therefore, he puts it this way that, “The term ‘social structure’ has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it”.

4.2.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN MIND

Levi-Strauss’ main interest lies in the logical structure of the mind i.e. how the human mind functions; how it creates connections and orders the world in a particular ways. Levi-Strauss’ structure, essentially, is mental or cognitive; in other words, he speaks about the structures of the mind. Levi-Strauss was interested in the patterns or “structure” which people have in mind when they operate social rules – in this case, marriage rules. In his first major published work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969), he argued that elementary structures represent the earliest forms of human kinship mainly found among Australian Aboriginal groupings. Elementary structures have positive rules of marriage – or the opposite of incest taboos, for example, you must marry a “cross-cousin”. Complex structures have negative rules, for example, you cannot marry your sister. The Crow-Omaha system stands between elementary and complex and includes most, though not all, societies with Crow or Omaha kinship terminologies. In other words, while this system defines whom one cannot marry (complex), there are so many prohibitions that in practice it resembles elementary structures. The problems of understanding the incest taboo, which is the restriction upon sexual relations with one’s closest kin and of finding a coherent ‘logic’ to the prohibitions and prescriptions bearing on the issue of who can marry who were long-standing for anthropology. Levi-Strauss’ proposal was bold and original through it remains controversial.

Levi-Strauss’ viewed that mind is not accessible to immediate observation. Therefore, the studies of the structure of the primitive world in general, kinship and mythical system in particular, are not ends in themselves but they are means which help him in understanding the basic mental structures. In *The Savage Mind* (1962) Levi-Strauss demonstrated that

primitives have a logical, although concrete, mode of thought. He further argues that how each culture has its own system of concepts and categories derived from experience and imposed by the surrounding natural world. For Levi-Strauss, the essence of culture is structure, each culture having its own configurations or structures. These structures exist as part of worldwide system of all possible structures founded on the psychic unity of human kind.

4.2.2 THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MYTH AND BINARY OPPOSITIONS

Levi-Strauss applied structuralist method to a wide range fields including his study of myth, which later published in four volumes titled as *Mythologiques* (1956-71). For him, myth is a type of thought produces an example of universal “structural principles” that underlie all human cultural and social systems. According to him, the subjective reports of the respondents are simply the basic resources out of which one can construct the underlying structures. In the process of analyzing the structure of myths and kinship systems of primitive societies he uncovered the underlying structure of myths and kinships systems of the whole society.

The methodology which he adopted for the analysis of myth can be broken down into different steps. The first step is to examine the number of variants of a particular myth; the second step is to isolate these variants into basic thematic elements. The third step is to chart the complex pattern in which thematic elements within every variant are interwoven. The fourth step is to construct “a table of possible permutations between these terms”. The fifth step is to offer the general object of analysis which at this level only, can yield necessary connections, the empirical phenomenon considered at the beginning being only one possible combination among others. The last step is not only to understand the myth in general but also by hypothesize the meaning of a particular myth within a particular society.

Levi-Strauss thought there are constant patterns in the organisation of human thought revealed through myths. Myths are tales – sacred or religious in nature – social rather than individual or anecdotal in subject matter, and concerned with the origin or creation of phenomena whether natural, supernatural or socio-cultural. Myths may be acted out in particular rituals. Myths and rituals share common symbolic elements and are complementary aspects to creative and religious expression. Myths endlessly combine and recombine the different symbolic elements. For instance, myth, as language, consists of both “langue” (timeless or a historical) and “parole” (time-specific) elements. The different versions of myths demonstrate constant creation and modification of mythical knowledge and thought. Myth is used to reflect on and symbolically mediate or resolve universal and culturally specific contradictions or *oppositions*. Oppositions are especially important in Levi-Strauss structuralist system.

Oppositions are binary: black/white, death/creation, maternal/paternal, raw/cooked. Binary opposites are common to all cultural myths. The term ‘binary oppositions’ is often attached to structuralism, and Levi-Strauss’ view is that people everywhere think thorough, and order the world with the help of contrasts. However, it must also be mentioned that these contrasts are in a relationship with a third element, which mediates between the two members of a binary opposition. A structuralist analysis of modes of preparing food may exemplify this: cooked food stands above raw food since culture stands above nature (the culture/nature contrast is one of Levi-Strauss’ universals).

4.3. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS/SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS-1

Fill in the blanks with suitable words.

- (i) The basic idea of structuralism was of language as a self-contained system whose elements are
- (ii) Elementary structures represent the forms of human kinship mainly found among Australian Aboriginal groupings.
- (iii) In *The Savage Mind* (1962) Levi-Strauss demonstrated that primitives have a mode of thought.
- (iv) Language consists of
- (v) Oppositions are

(vi) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer:

Myths are-

- (a) Tactics
- (b) Tales
- (c) Tests
- (d) Texts

(vii) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer:

The book written by Levi-Strauss is entitled as-

- (a) The Elementary Structures of Economy
- (b) The Elementary Structures of Family
- (c) The Elementary Structures of Kinship
- (d) The Elementary Structures of Religion

(viii) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer:

Levi-Strauss draws the inspiration from

- (a) Durkheim

- (b) Freud
- (c) Saussure
- (d) All of the above

4.4. THE MOVE TO POST-STRUCTURALISM

Post-structuralism designates a broad variety of critical perspectives and procedures that in the 1970s displaced structuralism from its prominence in the radically innovative way of dealing with language and other signifying systems. Post-structuralism is a movement associated with a wave of French thinkers: Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Michel Foucault. Poststructuralists tend to see all knowledge – history, anthropology, literature, psychology, etc. as textual. This means that knowledge is not composed just of *concepts*, but of *words*. Foucault and Derrida are two of the key names associated with the post-structuralist phase. Foucault has unquestionably become the most influential social thinker of all during the period since the 1960s. The point of departure for post-structuralism was Jacques Derrida's paper on “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, delivered in 1966 to an International Colloquium at Johns Hopkins University (The paper is included in Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, 1978) and exposed the weaknesses of structuralism. For the structuralist the individual is shaped by sociological, psychological and linguistic structures over which he/she has no control, but which could be uncovered by using their methods of investigation. For structuralism depends upon structures and structures depend upon center – and Derrida called into question the very idea of stable center. In other words, post-structuralism emerged as a reaction against the scientific pretensions of structuralism. The demand for ‘reflexivity’ – that structuralism should apply to itself – and difficulties of doing so, eventually led to its transformation into

post-structuralism. Nevertheless, it had offered a significant alternative to the attempt to model the social sciences on the natural sciences.

4.4.1. DERRIDA DISCOURSE AND DECONSTRUCTION

History took a linguistic turn under the influence of works in other social sciences – Levi-Strauss in anthropology, Saussure in linguistics, and the iconoclastic Derrida who declared that “there is nothing outside the text”. Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), the French thinker, developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts. His ideas were influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) – German philosophers who put to radical question fundamental philosophical concepts such as “knowledge”, “truth”, and “identity” – as well as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), whose *psychoanalysis* violated traditional concepts of a coherent individual consciousness and a unitary self. Derrida presented his views in three books, all published in 1967, entitled *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomena*. Derrida suggests that all texts have ambiguity and because of this the possibility of a final and complete interpretation is impossible.

The Derrida discourse was set against the phonocentric Western tradition of privileging speech over writing. Derrida’s classic, *Of Grammatology* (1967), is his most influential work in North America. It is the story of how – in the West – *speech* is central and natural and *writing* is marginal and unnatural. For Derrida the entire Western tradition of thought favors *speech*, the *spoken word* over *writing*, the *written word*. Derrida calls this bias as logocentrism, which believes that truth is the voice, the word, or the expression, of a central, original and absolute Cause or Origin. For example, in the New Testament the Word

is God and God is the Word. In fact, Derrida says that logocentrism has dominated the whole Western tradition and hence the whole history of logocentrism is one vast *metaphysics of presence*. In reaction to logocentrism, Derrida coined the term deconstruction which often involves a way of reading that concerns itself with decentering – with unmasking the problematic nature of all centers. For him, all Western thought is based on the idea of a center – an Origin, a Truth, an Ideal Form, a Fixed Point, an Essence, a God, a Presence, which is usually capitalized, and guarantees all meaning. For instance, Western culture has been centered on the idea of Christianity and Christ. And it is the same in other cultures as well. They all have their own central symbols. Then, what's the matter with that? The problem with centers, for Derrida, is that they *attempt* to exclude. In doing so, they ignore or *marginalize* others (which become the other). In patriarchal societies, man is central (and woman is the marginalized other, repressed, ignored, pushed to the margins).

If you have a culture which has Christ in the center of its icons, then Christians will be the central to that culture, and Buddhists, Muslims, Jews – anybody different – will be in the margins – marginalized – pushed to the outside. We must remember that Derrida was born into an assimilated Jewish family in Algiers, growing up as a member of a marginalised dispossessed culture. So the longing for a center spawns binary opposites, with one term of the opposition central and the other marginal. Moreover, centers want to fix, freeze the play of binary opposites. Derrida sees the history of Western thought as based on opposition: good vs. evil; spirit vs. matter; nature vs. culture; man vs. woman; speech vs. writing. These oppositions are defined hierarchically: the second term is seen as a corruption of the first, the terms are not equal opposites. According to Derrida we have no access to reality except through concepts, codes and categories, and the human mind functions by forming conceptual pairs such as these. You see how one member of the pair, (here the left), is privileged. The right-handed term then becomes marginalised. So, deconstruction is a tactic decentering, a

way of reading, which first makes us aware of the centrality of the central term. Then it attempts to *subvert* the central term so that the marginalised term can become central. The marginalized term temporarily overthrows the hierarchy.

Derrida thought that all text contained a legacy of these assumptions, and as a result of this, these texts could be re-interpreted with an awareness of the hierarchies implicit in language. Derrida does not think that we can reach an end point of interpretation, a truth for Derrida all texts exhibit ‘difference’: they allow multiple interpretations. Meaning is diffuse, not settled. Textuality always gives us a surplus of possibilities, yet we cannot stand outside of textuality in an attempt to find objectivity. Textuality is realizing how a text means rather than what it means. It is the realization that a text is made up of words and that words can mean different things.

One consequence of deconstruction is that certainty in textual analysis becomes impossible. In the language of textual analysis, Derrida proposes that there are no *fixed meanings* present in the text, despite any appearance to the contrary. There may be competing interpretations. As a result, the meanings in a text constantly shift both in relations to the subject who works with the text, and in relation to the cultural and social world in which the text is immersed. In this way, the literal readings of texts, along with the intentions of the author, are called into question by Derrida’s view of identity. His position privileges writing as opposed to speech and thought, for writing have a certain independence from author and reader which gives a priority to ambiguity, non-literality, and which frustrates the intentions of the author. The language used by historians was now understood to be both a mirror and a prison, and any historical text was imbricated, like petals in a flower, in negotiations with power structures within a society.

For Derrida language or ‘texts’ are not a natural reflection of the world. Text structures our interpretations of the world. Derrida argues that that language shapes us; while

texts create a clearing that we understand reality. Derrida's discourse, however, is not restricted to books or art works, for texts may consist of any set of ever-changing meanings. Hence, the world, and almost any object or combination of objects in it, may be regarded as a "text".

4.4.2. FOUCAULT AND THE GENEALOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Michel Foucault (1926-1984), the French historian and philosopher, can be seen as the most important representative of the post-structuralist movement. He agreed that language and society were shaped by rule-governed systems, but he disagreed with the structuralists on three counts. Firstly, he did not think that there were definite underlying structures that could explain the human condition; secondly, he thought that it was impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation objectively; and thirdly, he rejects idea of universal thought structures but retains focus on importance of language to structure our thinking.

His method was a type of historiography which he called archaeology and genealogy. Archaeology shows that systems of thought and knowledge (*epistemes* or discursive formations, in Foucault's terminology) are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period. Foucault attempted to analyse the 'discursive practices' or serious speech acts that lay claim to revealing knowledge. Rather than analyse these discursive practices in terms of their truth, he analyses them in terms of their history or genesis. He claimed that he attempting to do the 'archaeology of knowledge', to show the history of truth claims. Foucault studied the 'archaeology of knowledge' where his focus was to find out the discourse and rules and strategies for the formation of subject-positions and knowledge. He sought to show how the development of knowledge was intertwined with the mechanisms of (political) power. The concept of 'power' has been a central theme of his theories.

Foucault borrowed ‘genealogical’ approach from Nietzsche which looks at the origins of systems of social thought to show that any system is the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends. Foucault studied the ‘genealogy of power’ where his focus was to find out the facts about governance through knowledge production. His concerns have centered on how knowledge is produced and utilised in a society, and how power and knowledge are linked to each other. His view is that knowledge used to generate power which is then used for control. The higher the knowledge the greater the power it wields over the subjects. For example, scientific knowledge generates more power control than other knowledge. Similarly, medical knowledge gives power and is used as moral control of the insane. Through the genealogical approach of knowledge/power, Foucault examines a variety of institutions non-discursive practices to show how knowledge/power is pervasive.

In his text *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965) argues that mental hospitals become institutions for moral control and surveillance – deprive the insane of their freedom, and send a cautionary message to the rest of society. In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) the theme of knowledge/power was again implicated with each other. Foucault finds that technology is generated by knowledge to further power. For example, birth of the prison in modern society represents a shift in how power is used. In past, power used to control the “the body”, in modern society power used to control the “mind and soul”. Modern “disciplinary power” involves hierarchical observation (the ability of officials to oversee all they control with a single observation), normalizing judgement (the ability to punish those who violate norms), and the examination (the ability to observe subjects and to make normalizing judgements about people). Foucault is interested in the way that knowledge gives birth to technology that exerts power. In this context, he deals with the Panopticon, a metaphor for social control, which represents total surveillance, now

extends to all aspects of society. The Panopticon idea is that a prison with cells where the prisoners may be observed at all times by a single person in the large center tower. The activities of each prisoner or inmate could be clearly seen by the central observer, but each inmate would see neither the observer nor any other inmate. Such exercise forces the inmates to be self-restraint. Therefore, the Panopticon offers a structure of societal control and surveillance which allows officials the possibility of complete observation over criminals or territories. Foucault claims that knowledge is not truth, but power. In *History of Sexuality* (1976-1984), a three volume work Foucault links power and control of sexuality/body through specialised “scientific” knowledge and thereby enables control over the body, reproduction, etc. For him, sexuality is not something latent but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another.

Therefore what hold together his wide field of study was an interest in power/knowledge and how they work together? Foucault sees power is omnipresent, not because it embraces everything uniformly, but because it comes from everywhere. His propositions on power:

- i. Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations.
- ii. Relations of power are immanent in other types of relations.
- iii. Power comes from below – there is no binary opposition between the ruled and the ruler.
- iv. Where there is power, there is always resistance. Resistance is never exterior to power.

- v. One is always inside power. There is a plurality of resistances which exist in the field of power relations.
- vi. Knowledge can be an effect or instrument of power. But they may also be a point of resistance.
- vii. Knowledge transmits and produces power, but it also undermines and exposes it.

Critics of Foucault maintain that his analysis of power is simply dead end that disallows any possibility of political action. But Foucault insisted that political resistance was not just possible, but a necessary part of the equation.

4.5. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS/SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS-2

Fill in the blanks with suitable words.

(i) Poststructuralists tend to see all knowledge as

(ii) Where is power, there is always

(iii) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer:

In fact, Derrida says that the whole history of logocentrism is one vast-

(a) Metaphysics of presence

(b) Microphysics of power

(c) Micro-politics of power

(d) Micro-Macro integration

(iv) Which of the following statement is correct?

(a) Texts are not a natural reflection of the world.

(b) Text structures our interpretations of the world.

(c) Texts create a clearing that we understand reality.

(d) All of the above

(v) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer:

The book written by Foucault is entitled as-

- (a) The Algorithm of Knowledge
- (b) The Analysis of Knowledge
- (c) The Anthropology of Knowledge
- (d) The Archaeology of Knowledge

(vi) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer:

According to Foucault, disciplinary power consists of-

- (a) Observation
- (b) Hierarchical observation
- (c) Participant observation
- (d) Non-participant observation

(vii) Choose/Tick mark the correct answer

Panopticon offers a structure of-

- (a) Sociology
- (b) Socialisation
- (c) Surveillance
- (d) None of the above

4.6. LET US SUM UP

In this unit you learnt about the idea of structuralism and post-structuralism. We studied cultural anthropologist Levi-Strauss, who analysed on the concept of structure such cultural phenomena as mythology, kinship relations, and modes of preparing food. According to him all societies both modern and primitive have the same type of underlying structures. His orientation was closer to that of the philosopher Immanuel Kant but with great difference in method. In this unit we explained the central ideas of post-structuralism. We also described

the contributions of two key poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. We explained the central ideas of Derrida and these are:

- the bias of logocentrism
- the deconstruction technique
- the play of textuality
- the notion of difference

We explained the following central ideas of Michel Foucault:

- the archaeology of knowledge
- the genealogy of knowledge
- the disciplinary power
- the notion of Panopticon

We have also clarified the concepts of ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’. We tried to see the link between the two as described by Michel Foucault. We described the major argument put forward by Foucault for the development of surveillance in geophysical territories. Finally, we looked at some criticisms of Foucault’s theory raised in the context of post-structuralism.

4.7. KEY TERMS

Archaeology of Knowledge: A concept given by Michel Foucault which shows that systems of thought and knowledge are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period.

Binary Oppositions: The term ‘binary oppositions’ is coined by Levi-Strauss which means that people everywhere think thorough, and order the world with the help of contrasts e.g. black/white, inside/outside, King/subject, life/death, logos/mythos, nature/culture, speech/writing.

Complex Structure: Another concept given by Levi-Strauss to refer negative rules, for example, you cannot marry your sister.

Deconstruction: Derrida coined the term deconstruction which often involves a way of reading that concerns itself with decentring – with unmasking the problematic nature of all centers. The problem with centers, for Derrida, is that they *attempt* to exclude. In doing so, they ignore or *marginalise* others (which become the other). In patriarchal societies, man is central (and woman is the marginalized other, repressed, ignored, pushed to the margins).

Disciplinary Power: This is a concept given by Michel Foucault. It involves hierarchical observation (the ability of officials to oversee all they control with a single observation), normalizing judgement (the ability to punish those who violate norms), and the examination (the ability to observe subjects and to make normalizing judgements about people).

Elementary Structure: A concept given by Levi-Strauss which represents the earliest forms of human kinship. It has positive rules of marriage – or the opposite of incest taboos, for example, you must marry a “cross-cousin”.

Genealogy of Knowledge: Another concept given by Foucault to explain the origins of systems of social thought showing that any system is the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends. Foucault studied the ‘genealogy of power’ where his focus was to find out the facts about governance through knowledge production.

Logocentrism: A term given by Derrida which means that truth is the voice, the word, or the expression, of a central, original and absolute Cause or Origin. For example, the entire Western tradition of thought favours *speech*, the *spoken word* over *writing*, the *written word*. Derrida calls this bias as logocentrism.

Myth: In classical Greek, “mythos” signified any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology i.e. a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular

cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives.

Panopticon: Another concept given by Michel Foucault to explain social control and total surveillance. For example, a prison with cells where the prisoners may be observed at all times by a single person in the large center tower. The activities of each prisoner or inmate could be clearly seen by the central observer, but each inmate would see neither the observer nor any other inmate. Such exercise forces the inmates to be self-restraint.

Post-Structuralism: Post-structuralism is a movement associated with a wave of French thinkers: Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Michel Foucault. Poststructuralists tend to see all knowledge – history, anthropology, literature, psychology, etc. as textual. This means that knowledge is not composed just of *concepts*, but of *words*.

Structuralism: The term is used to refer to any approach which regards the structure of society in creating the individual. More specifically, it refers to a particular theoretical approach which became fashionable in the late 1960s and early 1970s and which spread across a range of discipline including social anthropology, linguistics, literary criticism, psychoanalysis and sociology.

Structure: It is an ordered arrangement of parts or components.

Textuality: Textuality is realising how a text means rather than what it means. It is the realisation that a text is made up of words and that words can mean different things.

The Crow-Omaha system: This concept too has given Levi-Strauss, It stands between elementary and complex structures and includes most, though not all, societies with Crow or Omaha kinship terminologies. In other words, while this system defines whom one cannot

marry (complex), there are so many prohibitions that in practice it resembles elementary structures.

4.8. ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

Check Your Progress-1

(i) signs, (ii) earliest, (iii) logical, (iv) langue and parole, (v) binary, (vi) (b), (vii) (c), (viii) (d)

Check your progress-2

(i) Textual, (ii) resistance, (iii) (a), (iv) (d), (v) (d), (vi) (b), (vii) (c)

4.9. SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

4.9.1. SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

(i) Define structuralism.

(ii) Define post-structuralism

(iii) Distinguish between structuralism and post-structuralism.

(iv) What is binary opposite?

(v) What is deconstruction?

4.9.2. LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS

(i) Discuss the anthropological structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss.

(ii) How does Levi-Strauss differ from other structuralists?

(iii) Outline essential features of structuralism and write a critique.

(iv) Explain Derrida’s contribution to post-structuralism.

(v) Do Foucault’s writings enable us to reach a better understanding of power?

4.10. FURTHER READINGS/SUGGESTED READINGS

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